ROME AT WAR

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Front cover: Roman helmet (Brendan Hunter/Getty Images)

Title page: Hadrianic legionaries arrayed in battle order. The front ranks hold their *pila* ready for use as thrusting spears, and the next four ranks prepare to throw their *pila* over the heads of the front ranks. (Peter Dennis © Osprey Publishing)

Contents page: The second century AD Portonaccio Sarcophagus, the tomb of a Roman general who participated in the German campaigns against Germanic barbarians with the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, in the years AD172–175. Museo Nazionale Romano. (Photo by Prisma/UIG/Getty Images)

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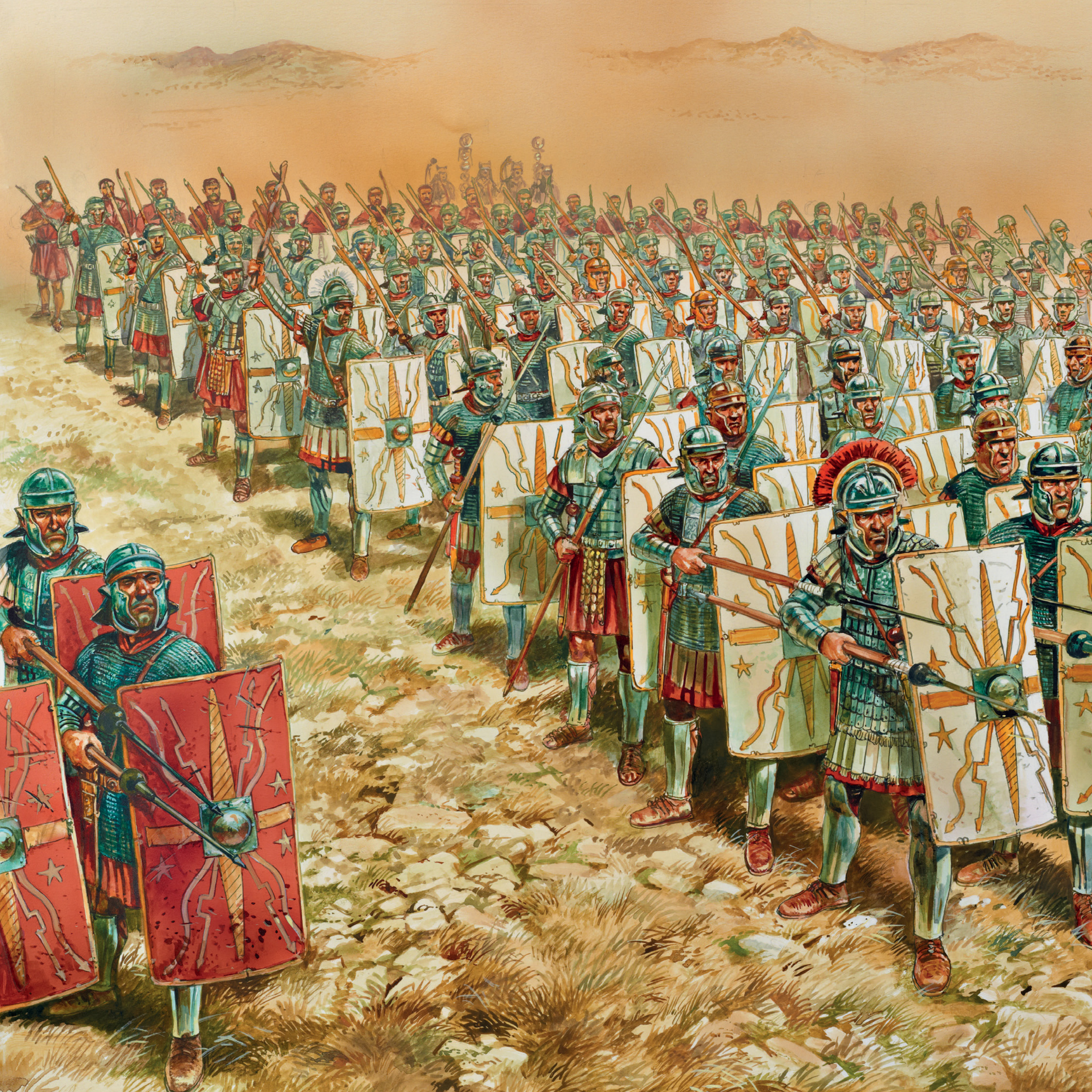

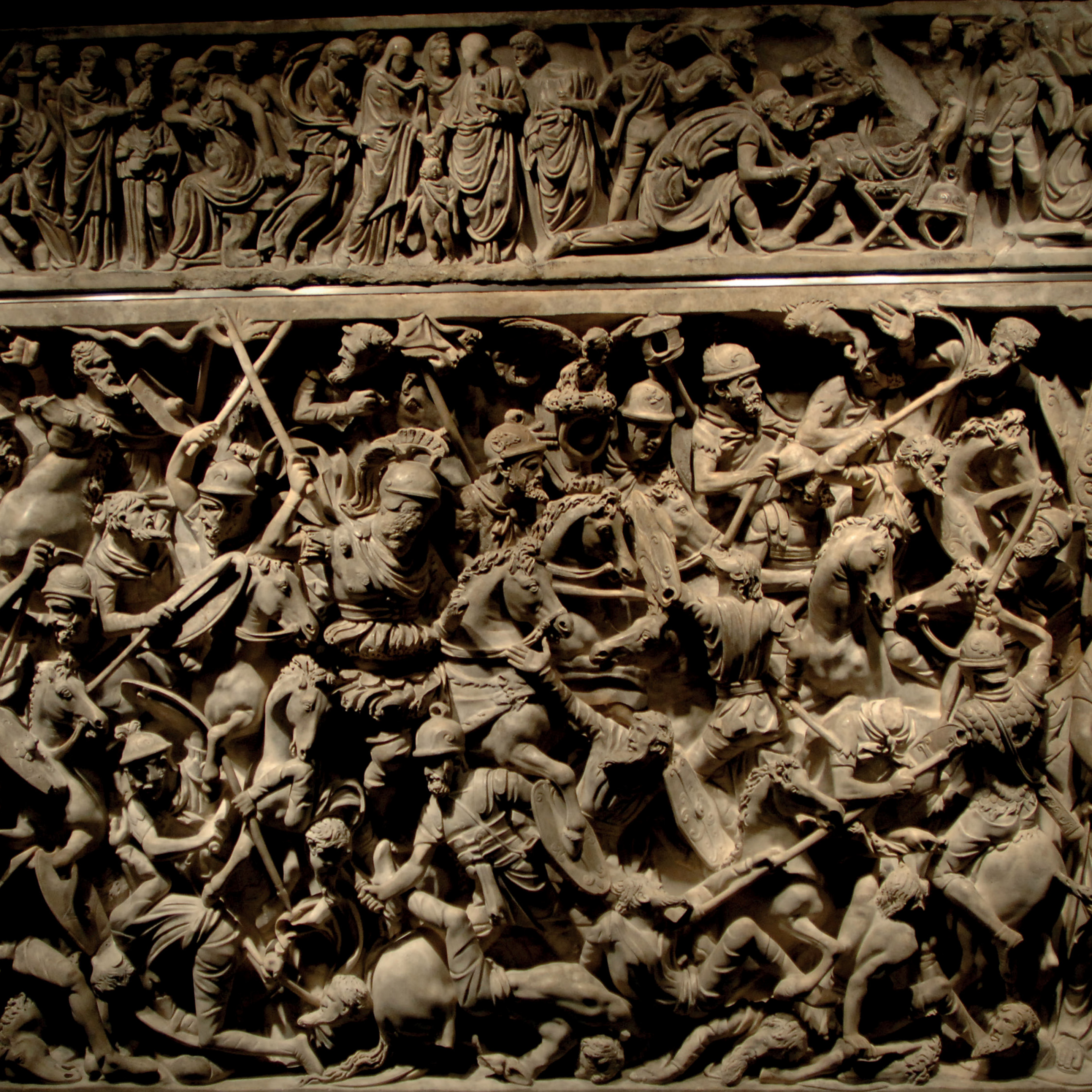

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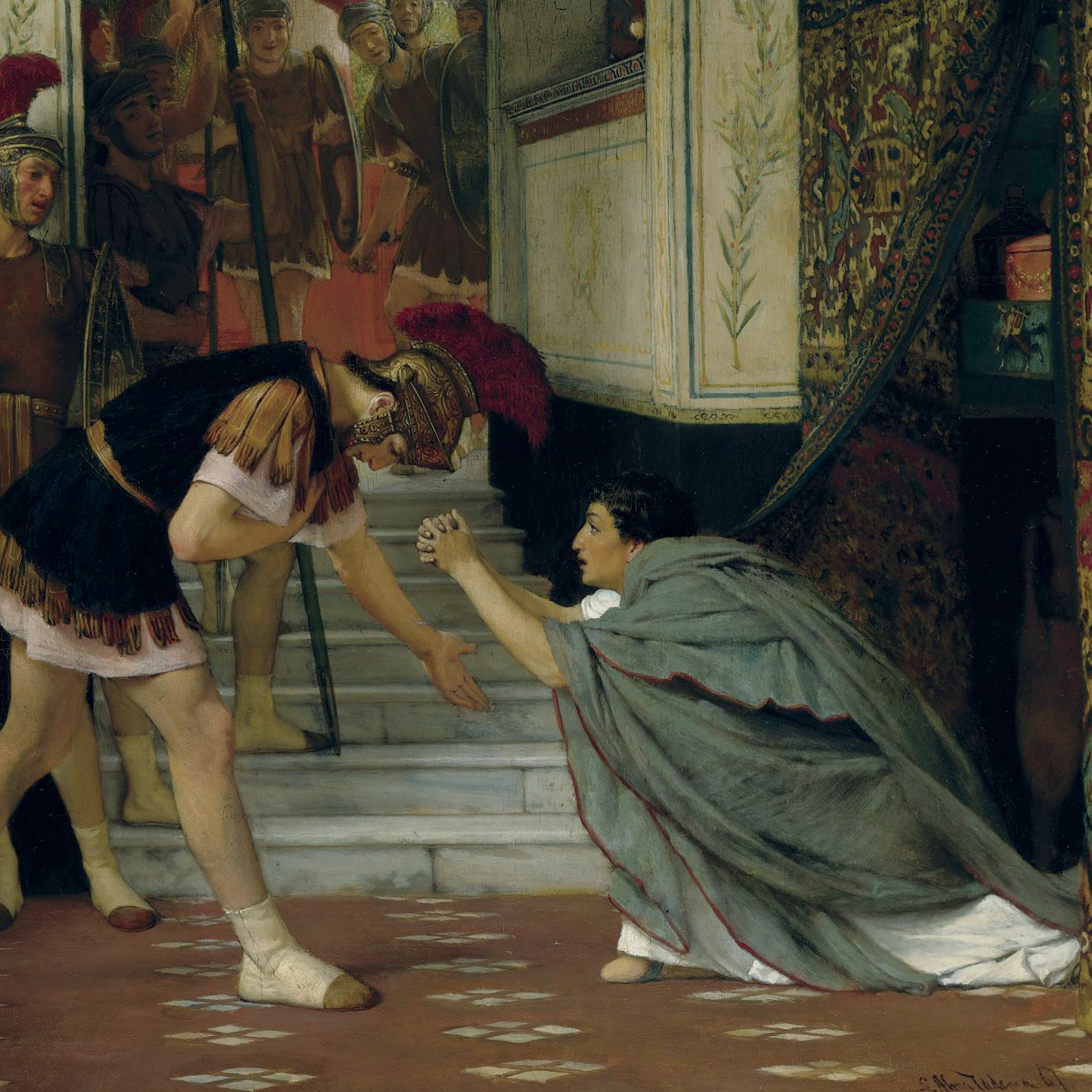


THE EARLY REPUBLIC 753–150BC

The powerful Italian neighbours of Rome vied constantly for land, trade and the spoils of war. Alliances were forged and broken as each city-state struggled for dominance. Rome's greatest allies could quickly become her most feared enemies…

FOUNDATION AND MONARCHY

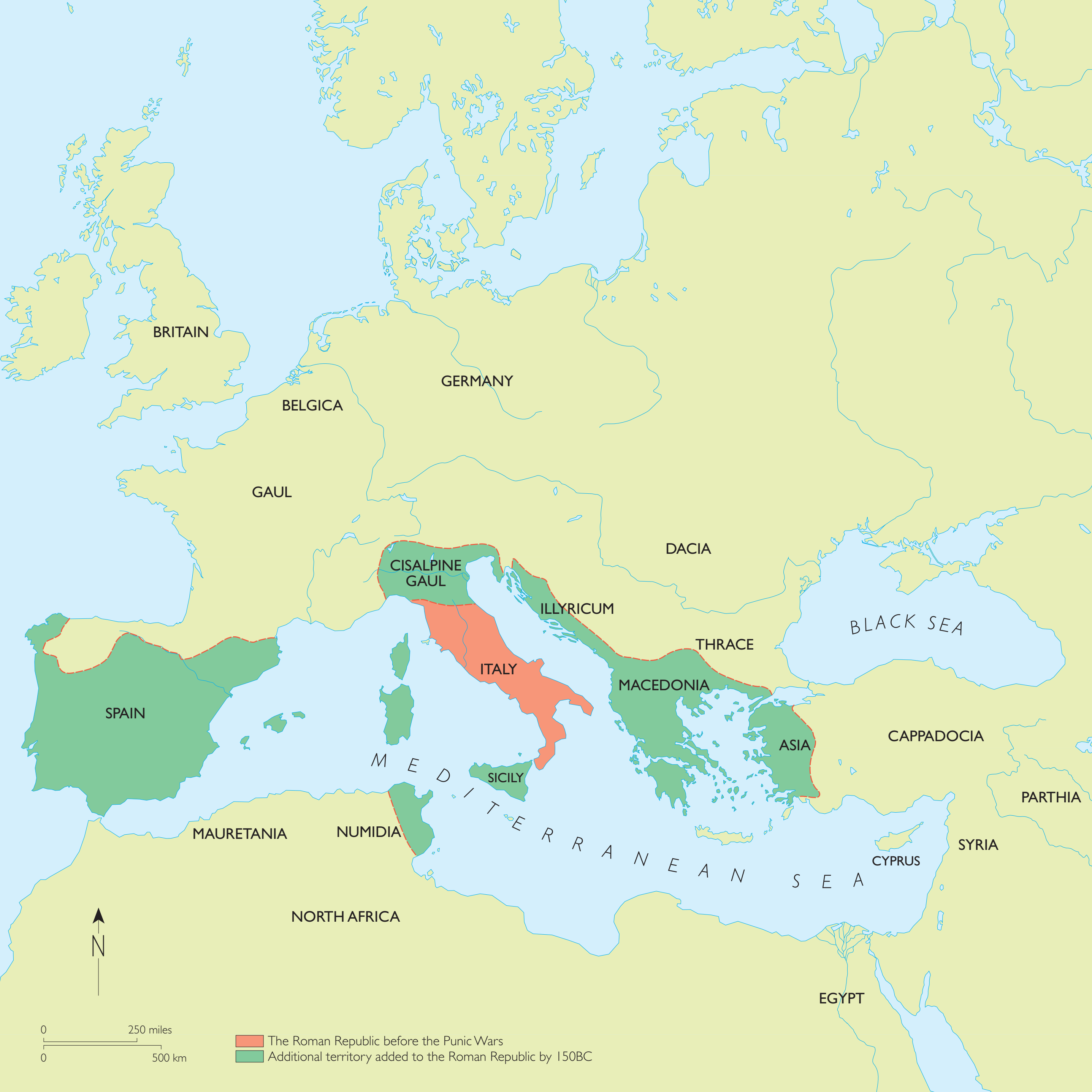
The story of how Rome was born is steeped in violence. The legend of orphaned twins Romulus and Remus being suckled by a she-wolf and founding a city on the Palatine Hill in 753BC soon descends into fratricide, as Romulus kills his brother whilst jealously defending his new city. The method by which Romulus set about populating the city involved kidnap and rape, as the neighbouring Sabine women were abducted to become Rome's first mothers. Romulus himself eventually disappeared during a

LEFT Statue on the Capitoline Hill in Rome of Romulus and Remus, the mythical founders of Rome, suckled by a wolf. (Education Images/UIG via Getty Images) violent thunderstorm, believed to have been taken up by his father, Mars, the god of war. Although the stuff of fables, these violent beginnings seem most appropriate for a city that grew into an empire by the strength of its sword and the ferocity and skill of its armies.

Records of the organisation of Rome's military forces under the early monarchy are scarce, but the writings of Roman historians such as Livy and Dionysius can build a picture of the emphasis given to military organisation and war by Rome's first seven kings.

Romulus, the first king, was certainly military-minded, and built his power on his ability on the battlefield. This was considered a most appropriate kingly quality at a time when borders were constantly shifting, and the defence of one's own land, as well as the acquisition of others, was the means to success and survival. Romulus' successor, the Sabine Numa Pompilius (715–673BC), was a much more peaceful king, and concentrated on religious reform. Rome's third king, Tullus Hostilius (673–641BC) was very war-minded, and destroyed neighbouring Alba Longa, effectively doubling the population of Rome with Alban refugees. The successor to Hostilius, Ancus Martius (641–617BC), made shrewd military reforms in order to defend his city, and expanded Rome's frontiers and population through conquest. Although successful in war, the Roman army up to this time mainly consisted of groups of warriors fighting together under the command of wealthy nobles. This had some proven efficacy, but would have to adapt and become a more homogenous unit to be able to survive the battles ahead.

The fifth king of Rome was the first Etruscan to hold the position. According to Livy, Lucius Tarquinius Priscus (616–579BC) waged war with the neighbouring Latins in order to garner favour in his new kingdom. Certainly, the period of


BRITAIN
GERMANY
BELGICA
GAUL
DACIA
CISALPINE GAUL
ILLYRICUM
BLACK SEA
THRACE
ITALY
MACEDONIA
SPAIN
CAPPADOCIA
ASIA
SICILY
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
PARTHIA
MAURETANIA
NUMIDIA
SYRIA
CYPRUS
NORTH AFRICA
EGYPT
N
0
250 miles
0
500 km

🟥 The Roman Republic before the Punic Wars
🟩 Additional territory added to the Roman Republic by 150BC

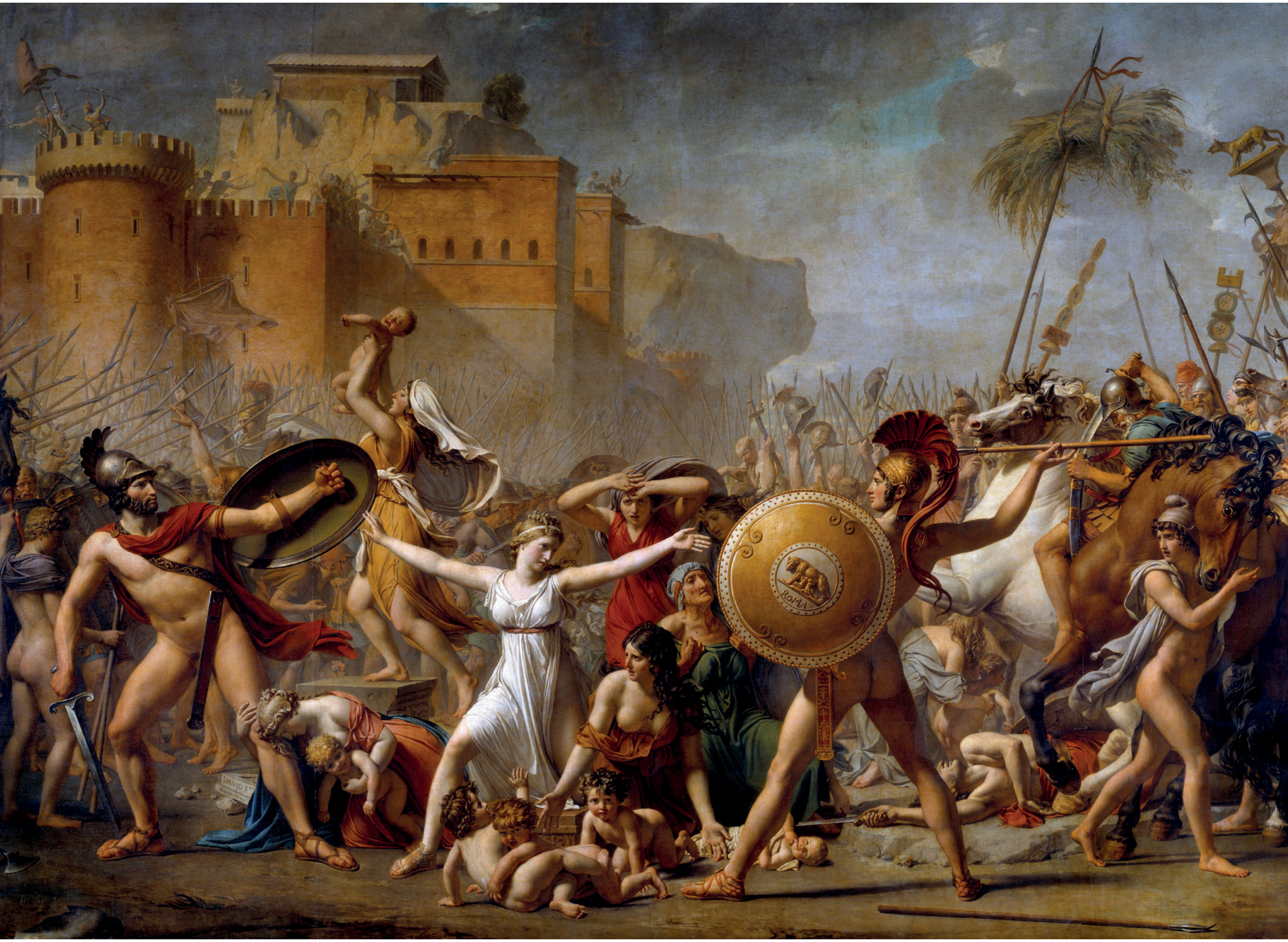
Etruscan rule in Rome saw its most significant military reforms of the early period, due to the introduction of the Etruscan form of phalanx warfare and Greek-style hoplite tactics in the Roman army around this time. The phalanx system worked by columns of men standing in tight formation, with overlapping shields, armed with long spears and swords. The resulting dense body of men was difficult to penetrate and operated almost like one vast weapon.

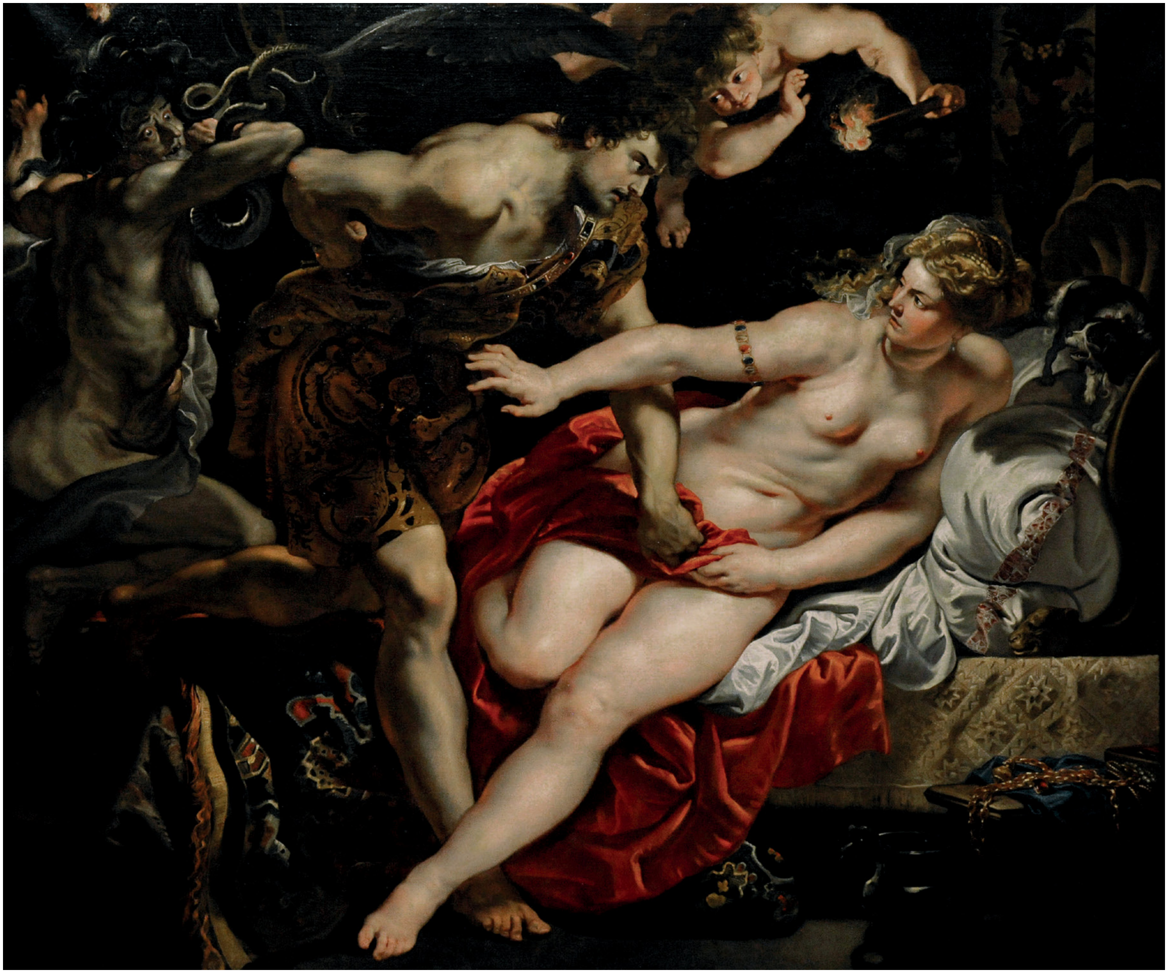
Much of the conversion to hoplite tactics is associated with the sixth king of Rome, who was the second Etruscan in this role. Servius Tullius (579–534BC) was said to have introduced a sweeping reform, replacing the order of citizenship based on race with one based on residence, thus increasing the pool of military manpower. These newly defined citizens were divided into one of five classes, determined by their wealth. From these classes, groups of troops called centuries were drawn, providing the basis for an army where the wealthy were bound to serve and to provide their own military equipment. The class system also controlled who could vote at assemblies, which meant political and military life were unavoidably, and indeed deliberately, interwoven.

BIRTH OF THE REPUBLIC

The reign of Tarquinius Superbus (534–509BC), or 'Tarquin the Proud', is marked by cruelty and violence, but his success as a warmonger ensured the continued,

RIGHT *The Intervention of the Sabine Women*: Hersilia and the Sabine women stopping the battle between their Roman husbands (right) and their Sabine brothers (left), showing them their children. Painting by J. L. David, 1799, Louvre Museum, Paris. (Photo by Leemage/Corbis via Getty Images)


ROMA



and rapid, rise of Rome as an early superpower. It was, however, the cruel streak of Tarquinius and his family that resulted in the final toppling of the monarchy in Rome, and the establishment of the early Republic. Lucius Junius Brutus, the nephew of Tarquinius, is said to have led his fellow citizens in an uprising against the corrupt and violent monarchy, thus becoming the founder of the Roman Republic in 509BC. The new regime established in the new Republic was to be based on patriotism and courage. However, it was the strength of its armies, and the military resolve of its leaders, that would dictate the success or failure of the Republic.

The Republic was ruled by a senate and two consuls – chief magistrates or judges – and these consuls were elected annually. The dominant power of the aristocratic class, or patricians, in the senate was a matter for protest, and was increasingly challenged by the common people, or plebeians, until by 300BC the plebeians had obtained the right to hold any office. More offices were added to the political organisation, including *tribuni* or tribunes (who were originally to protect the plebeians' rights against the patricians, but later became military officers), *quaestores* (prosecutors or judges, later becoming paymasters or treasurers), *aediles* (magistrates responsible for supervising public building and games, the police, and the corn supply), *censores* (responsible for taking the census of citizens and regulating taxes) and *praetores* (magistrates junior to the consuls).

LEFT *The Rape of Lucrece*, painted by Rubens in 1610, depicts the incident which tradition holds led to the uprising against the monarchy. According to one story, the king's son, Tarquin, was staying with Lucretia and her husband. Entering her room at night by stealth, he threatened to kill her and one of her slaves, then claim he had caught them in an adulterous relationship, unless she submitted to his advances. The next day she publicly accused him to her father and the chief magistrate, then stabbed herself, forcing her listeners to swear revenge. The State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg. (PHAS/UIG via Getty Images)

Rome gradually extended her power to neighbouring peoples, and by the start of the fifth century BC, Rome was the most important city in Latium. The threat to the region from a number of Apennine hill tribes resulted in a common defensive alliance, aimed at presenting a united front against the enemy tribes. Much of the fifth century BC saw Rome at war alongside the Latins, defending Latium against the Sabines, Volsci and Aequi, who were eager to settle in more fertile territory. In 396BC, Rome effectively doubled the territory under the control of the Republic following a six-year-long siege of the important Etruscan city of Veii, about 20km north of Rome. However, a run of success and dominance was about to come to an end when Gallic Celts, who had been fighting their way south from northern Italy, came to within a few miles of Rome. A Roman army met them, but the Celts were far more numerous, ferocious and skilled in battle than the Romans had expected, and the Roman army fled after severe losses.

The victorious Celts proceeded to overrun the city of Rome, burning and demolishing temples and killing innocent citizens. A small number of soldiers would not leave a garrison in the city, and remained trapped there for seven months under their leader, Marcus Manlius. News that their homelands were being sacked in their absence eventually convinced the Celtic leader, Brennus, that their might was needed elsewhere, and the Celts finally left Rome to be rebuilt by her surviving citizens, returning from where they had fled across the Tiber. Rome would not be occupied by a non-Roman army again until AD410.

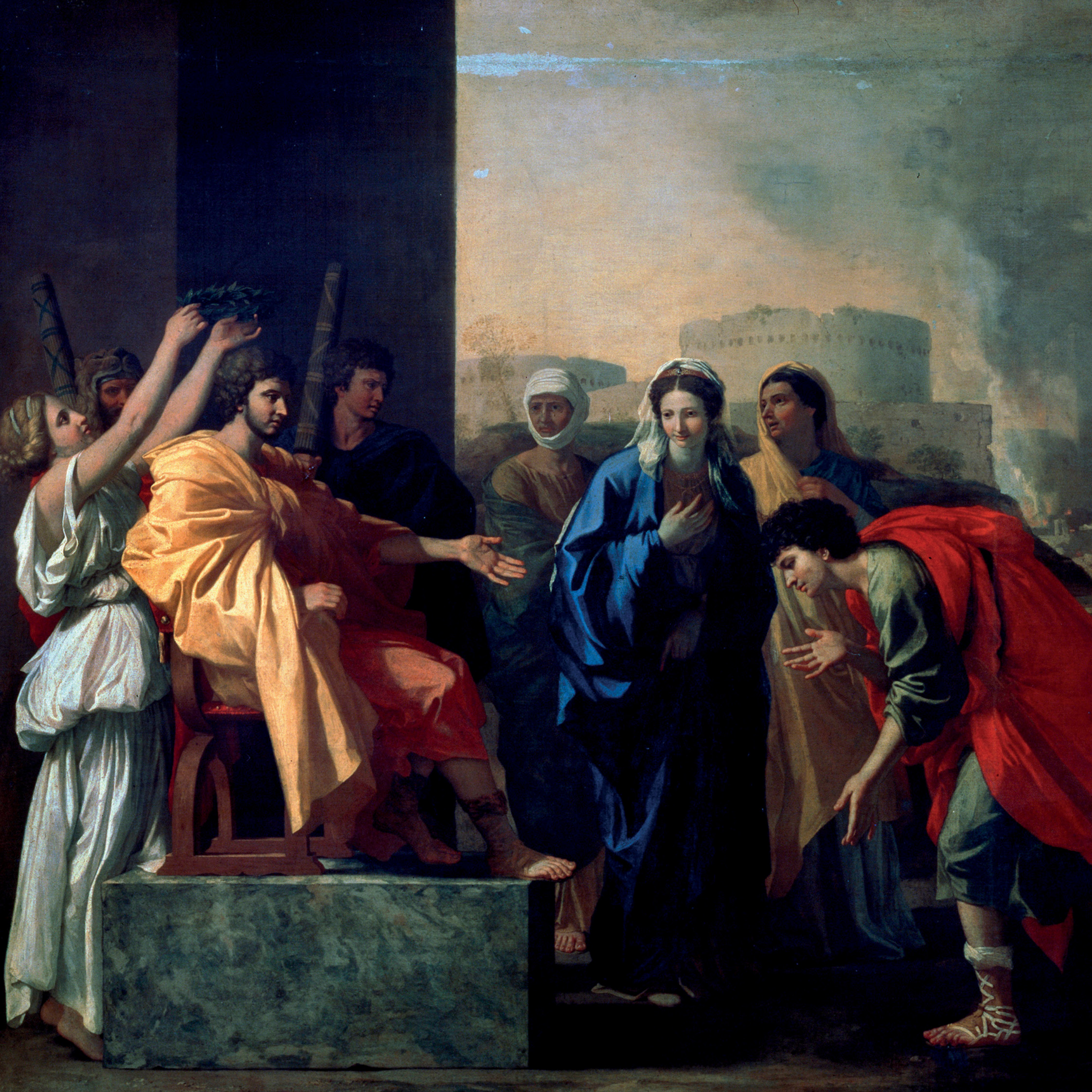
Rome's next major wars were undertaken against the Latin towns of Tibur and Praeneste, and after a number of victories over others of the Latins, Rome had no serious challenger in Latium, and possessed a secure northern border with Etruria. It was Rome's next entanglements that were to draw her into new theatres.

EXPANSION AND THE PUNIC AND MACEDONIAN WARS

War with the Samnites in 343BC took the Romans into the southern highlands of Italy, and after suppressing a rebellion from the Volsci in 338BC, the Romans fundamentally reformed their relationship with the Latins and their other allies. Many communities lost their independence and became *municipia* with Roman citizenship; others negotiated new treaties with Rome. Roman expansionist policies continued to anger the Samnites, and a final Third Samnite War saw a grand alliance of Samnites, Etruscans, Celts and Umbrians defeated piecemeal by the Roman army, so that by the middle of the third century BC Rome's dominance seemed beyond challenge. As Rome had extended her hegemony, she had come into conflict with Greek cities scattered around the peninsula's southern coastlines. One of these cities, Tarentum (Taranto), had appealed to Pyrrhus, king of Epirus in northwestern Greece, for help. Crossing the Adriatic in 280BC, Pyrrhus defeated the Romans in a hard-fought contest, prompting him to exclaim: 'Another such victory and we are undone', giving rise to the immortal expression, a 'Pyrrhic victory'.

Responding to an appeal from the Greek city of Syracuse, Pyrrhus crossed over to Sicily in 278BC and was soon in possession of most of the island, driving the Carthaginians into its western extremity. His high-handedness, however, eventually lost him the support of the Greek cities he had come to assist and he was forced to withdraw. As he set sail he looked back and prophetically observed, 'What a field we are leaving to the Romans and Carthaginians to exercise their arms.' True enough, from 264BC until 146BC, the arms of both the Romans and Carthaginians would be exercised to exhaustion in the Punic Wars. Eventual Roman victory was achieved at massive cost.

The First Punic War (264–241BC) saw the Romans achieve ascendancy through naval warfare, with the Carthaginian leader Hamilcar Barca forced to negotiate for



peace. The Second Punic War (218–201BC) began when his son, Hannibal, set out to regain Sicily and to curb the expansion of the Roman Empire. His ambitious crossing of the Alps from Spain with a huge army, famously including 34 elephants, brought him to within striking distance of Rome and he won swift victories in northern Italy and at Lake Trasimene. In 216BC Rome experienced her largest ever defeat when Hannibal's army destroyed the armies of Rome at Cannae. It was only when Publius Cornelius Scipio (later Scipio Africanus) took the offensive against Carthaginian territory in Spain and Africa that the tide turned, and once again Carthage was forced to negotiate for peace.

During the period of the second Punic War, Rome was also engaged in a number of conflicts with the Macedonians. After Hannibal's victory over the Romans at Cannae, Philip V of Macedonia signed a treaty with him against Rome, then pursued expansionist policies from Illyria on the eastern shore of the Adriatic northwards. The Romans struck a deal with the Aetolians of Greece, long-standing enemies of the Macedonians, to help halt Philip's advance, but Philip's violent presence in Aetolian lands caused them to drop their Roman allegiance. Once Hannibal had been forced out of Italy, back to Carthage in 205BC, Scipio could finally deal with the Macedonian threat, and he assembled an army to do so. However, peace terms were agreed between Scipio and Philip, allowing Philip to keep most of his land gains in return for no further expansion. A primary concern for the Romans was probably to keep Philip from aiding Hannibal, so the peace terms were suitably generous and seemed to please both sides.

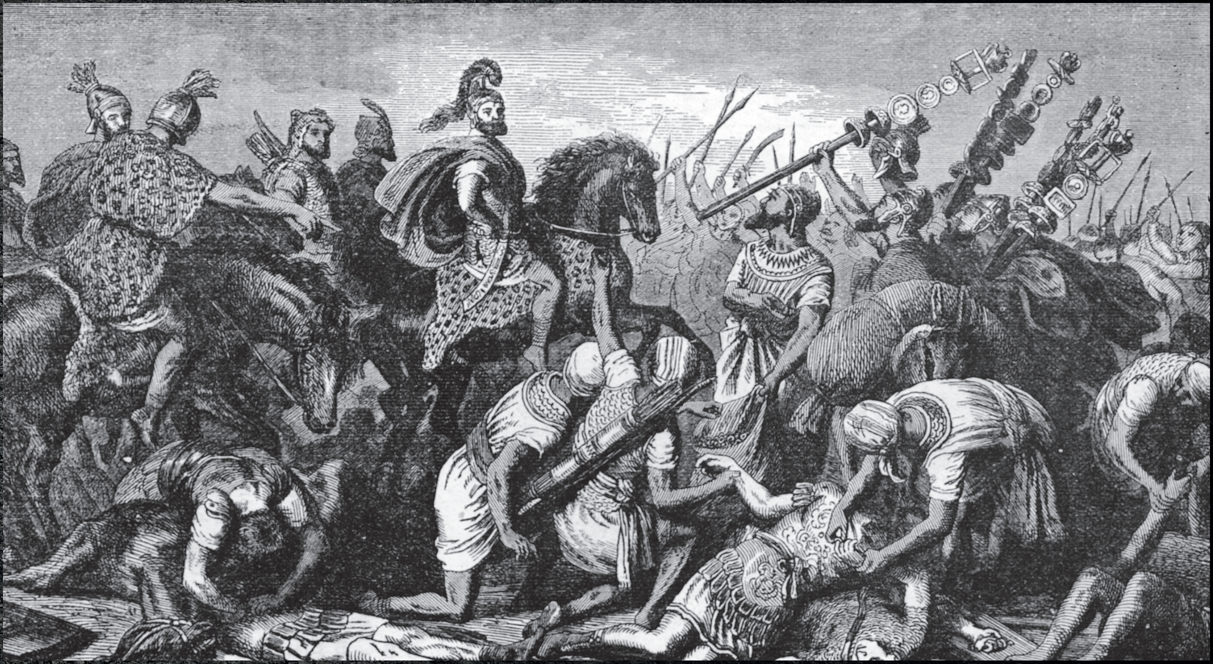
LEFT *The Magnanimity of Scipio Africanus*, 1640, by Nicolas Poussin. Scipio was renowned as a merciful leader, as the many portrayals of his continence show. State A. Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow. (Photo by Fine Art Images/Heritage Images/Getty Images)

THE BATTLE OF CANNAE

The year 216BC marked the apogee of Hannibal's military career, with Cannae the foremost demonstration of his brilliance. In that year, the Roman Senate decided that Hannibal must be brought to battle, so four new legions were mobilised and ordered to join the four already shadowing Hannibal in Apulia; concentrated together they would then crush him, in accordance with traditional military thinking. Hannibal had occupied Cannae, giving his army an important opportunity to benefit from the excellent and much-needed food stores around the citadel. Ever mindful of the need to use every means in his power to force the enemy to fight, Hannibal had little doubt that the Romans would bring their army south to give battle.

So it was that the fatal day arrived, and at first light, the Roman commander Marcus Terentius Varro moved the Roman army across the river Aufidus on to the east bank. He positioned the cavalry on the right wing, resting on the river, with the legions next to them and the cavalry of the allies on the left wing. In front of the whole army were the light infantry. The deployment was conventional enough, but Varro shortened the frontages of the legions, and reduced the distances between the maniples within them. There was a reversion to the theory of sheer mass, so flexibility was renounced and the rigidity of the phalanx was reinstated. The Roman army numbered some 80,000 infantry and more than 6,000 cavalry.

While the Romans were completing their deployment, Hannibal brought his army into line. His light infantry and Balearic slingers formed a screen behind which his main force matched the Roman deployment. On his left flank were the Spanish and Gallic cavalry, resting on the river, next to them his heavy infantry. The Gauls were thrown forward in an arc, facing and extending beyond the Roman front, with the Numidian cavalry on his right flank. Being thinly spread, Hannibal's 40,000 infantry retained the tactical flexibility to manoeuvre and slowly give ground before the massed Roman legions; the arc would be reversed to curve rearwards and as the Romans pressed forward, they would be enveloped. The risk was that the centre of the arc would be torn apart, in which case the battle would be lost, but Hannibal's cavalry were superior both in number – some 10,000 – and quality, so could be relied upon to defeat their Roman opponents and then complete the encirclement. That is exactly what happened. As the Romans pressed forward, the Carthaginian infantry overlapped their front and assaulted them on the



Hannibal and the Carthaginians despoiling dead Romans after the battle of Cannae. (Photo by Time Life Pictures/Mansell/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images)

flanks. Compressed together and unable to protect themselves, the casualties mounted and the forward momentum began to falter. Meanwhile, the Roman cavalry had been routed and the returning Numidians fell upon the Roman rear. Completely surrounded and still further compressed, the Romans were slaughtered where they stood. According to Polybius, only some 3,500 Romans managed to escape, while 10,000 were taken prisoner, and 70,000 left dead on the battlefield. Amongst those who escaped was the perpetrator of the disaster, Varro.

News of Cannae shook Rome to its very core. Even so, the Senate moved rapidly to assert social discipline and forbade public mourning or demonstrations of distress within the city. Taking the defeat as evidence of divine disfavour, a Celtic male and female and a Greek male and female were buried alive in the cattle market to placate the gods.

Against the terms of his agreement with Scipio, Philip promptly went on to gain more territory in Greece, through force. Roman ambassadors sent to demand his withdrawal from the lands of their allies were unsuccessful, and war was declared. Titus Quinctius Flaminius took Roman command in 198BC, pursuing a more aggressive policy against Philip, and in 197BC the two sides met at the battle of Kynoskephalai. By now the Roman army had adopted a more flexible way of fighting than the phalanx, and their increased manoeuvrability helped them to defeat the Macedonian phalanx. Philip had to give up all his lands in the Roman allied territory of Greece, and all Greek cities came under the direct control of Rome. Due to the limited resources left to Rome after the recent Second Punic War, there were not enough Roman soldiers to garrison Greece, so Flaminius granted Greece her freedom from either a Roman or Macedonian military presence. This was a shrewd move, as it served to make the Greeks even firmer allies of the Romans, without any need to draw on Roman manpower reserves.

Shortly before the brutal Third Punic War (149–146BC) in which Carthage was finally destroyed and its population killed or enslaved, Scipio Nasica, the grandson of the military genius of the Second Punic War, Scipio Africanus, warned the Senate that though Rome's position as a dominant power should be preserved, Carthage should not be destroyed as a rival. Were this to occur, there would be no check to Rome's arrogant disregard for the legitimate interests and concerns of smaller states. Moreover, in the absence of any external threat, the Roman Confederation would be in danger of disintegrating as fractious political and social groups pursued their own self-interested ends. Events proved Scipio's prediction to be remarkably perspicacious.

RIGHT Modern relief depicting a Macedonian phalanx, near the statue of Alexander the Great, Thessaloniki, Greece. (Photo by DeAgostini/Getty Images)

THE EARLY REPUBLIC 753–150BC

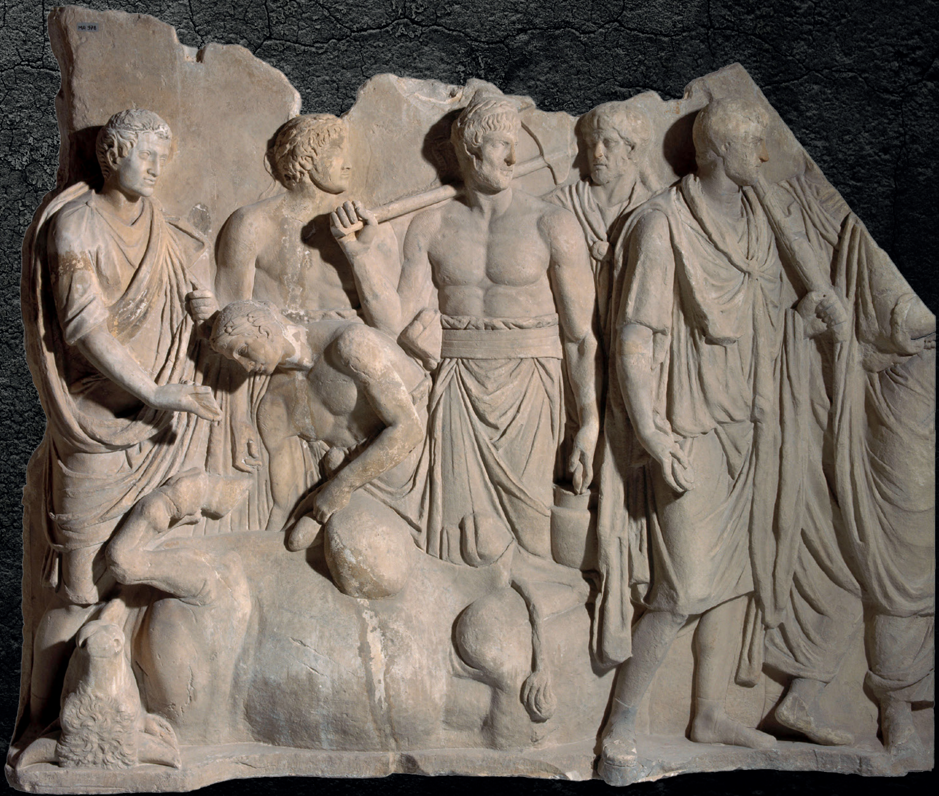
RELIGION IN EARLY REPUBLICAN ROME

As the Romans extended their conquests, so they absorbed the religion and culture of the races they had subjected, and in the process, modified their own earlier animistic worship. It was the influence of the Greek cities in southern Italy and later in Sicily that made the greatest impact. By the third century BC the Romans had assimilated the Greek gods and goddesses. Greek names were Romanised: Demeter became Ceres; Poseidon and Ares became Neptune and Mars; and Aphrodite and Hestia became Venus and Vesta, though this renaming did not change their fickle natures and wanton ways.

There was no established church with a hierarchy, creed and moral code. Nor was there a single all-powerful god, but rather a multiplicity of deities interfering with and squabbling over their different interests and moral protégés. To the majority of Romans the mythology was, in varying degrees, a portrayal of immortals to whom established rites were due and who had to be propitiated. The fulfilment of these obligations would ensure the safe return of mariners by Neptune or victory in battle by Mars, while Ceres would provide an abundant harvest and Jupiter, rain. Neglect, on the other hand, would lead to abandonment, if not the purposeful infliction of disaster. Nevertheless, there were a few hardy souls like the consul Appius Claudius Pulcher who, before the battle of Drepana off Sicily, lost patience when the sacred chickens would not eat and so provide a favourable omen. He flung the birds overboard with the short-tempered advice: 'If you won't eat, then try drinking instead.' Whether his subsequent disastrous defeat can be ascribed to his irreverence is a matter for conjecture, though the gods cannot have been too enraged since he managed to escape with his life.

As there was no church, when Rome became a republic the responsibility for official religious ceremonies became a function of the state, the chief officials being the College of Pontiffs, headed by the Pontifex Maximus (Chief Priest), who were the judges and arbiters of divine and human affairs and the interpreters of portents, augurs and omens. Their role was of great significance since the gods could only make their wishes known through coded messages. Divination, however, was not confined to these officials; so long as he could afford to do so, no citizen entered into an undertaking of any importance without offering a sacrifice and reading for himself the signs in the victim's entrails.

Beliefs varied considerably, and religion and its role in determining the course of people's lives was as varied as it is now. Even so, after allowing for this individuality, there can be little doubt that religion influenced military decisions. Major ventures were frequently not undertaken through lack of favourable portents, causing delay and hesitancy. Among soldiers too, individual interpretations inevitably had some bearing on the way they faced an impending battle. A favourable omen could raise morale, but an unfavourable one could cause anxiety.



A religious diviner, or haruspex, consults the entrails of a sacrificed bull. Louvre, Paris. (Photo by: Christophel Fine Art/ UIG via Getty Images)

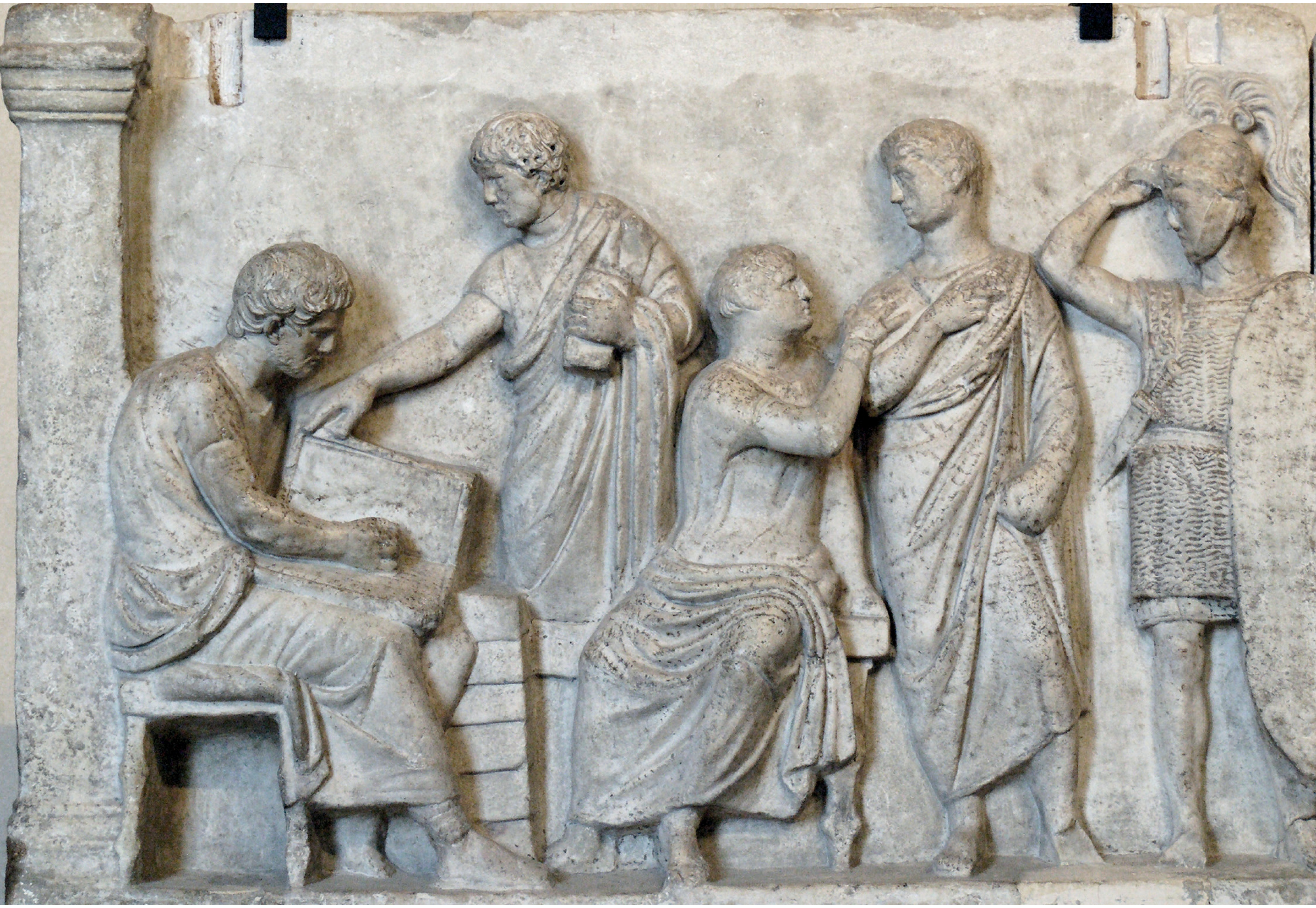
WHO WERE ROME'S SOLDIERS?

CITIZEN SOLDIERS

During her early history, Rome depended entirely upon a citizen militia to protect herself and to conquer the local tribes. This levy, or *legio* – which gave the legion its name – was called up only in times of emergency and was discharged as soon as that emergency ended. The men were primarily farmers and traders, and served for a few weeks or a month or two per year at most. They provided their own arms, armour and equipment, though the state did pay them a small allowance to compensate for loss of earnings, and they fought because, as citizens, they had a vested interest in the security and expansion of Rome. As Rome grew in size, however, the need to defend it required a more extensive and centrally organised force.

The reforms of Servius Tullius in the sixth century BC extended the pool of resources from which the Roman army could draw. The role of soldier was no longer solely dependent on the financial ability to buy the most expensive armour and weapons. Citizens with average incomes could afford to arm themselves as light infantry, and play an equally important part in the army as their richer neighbours. The division of Rome into five classes neatly pigeonholed each man of fighting age into the area of service most appropriate for his income. It also meant that the centuries provided by each class were all fighting in a similar manner, with the same sorts of arms. This made military planning far more scientific and predictable.

RIGHT A central factor in the 'Servian' reforms of the fifth to fourth centuries BC, ascribed by Roman tradition to Servius Tullius, was the constitutional innovation of the census, which divided citizens into property classes. In this first century BC sculpture from the Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus, a clerk records names during either a census or the levying of citizen-soldiers. (Jastrow/Public Domain/Wikimedia)



By the time of the First Punic War, a new type of levy based on the tribe – there were four urban tribes and 16 rural tribes of Rome at this time – had been introduced in an attempt to ease the burden on the wealthier classes of Rome, and to ensure a more equal distribution of the load amongst those citizens who had obtained their citizenship in more recent times. At the beginning of each year the two consuls were elected, and their first task was to appoint 24 military tribunes, six for each of the four legions of Rome. On specially appointed days, all male citizens between the ages of 17 and 46 and who owned property above the value of 11,000 *asses* had to assemble on the Capitoline Hill, where they were arranged by height and age group. The men were then brought forward four at a time for selection by the tribunes of each legion, the legions taking it in turn to have first choice in order to ensure that the experienced men and those in the best physical condition were evenly distributed among the legions. One recruit then swore an oath of obedience, and all the others said *'Idem in me'* ('the same for me'). They were given a date and place of assembly, and then dismissed. Men between the ages of 47 and 60 were also enrolled in times of need to serve as garrison troops. Those citizens who fell below the minimum wealth level, called *proletarii*, were under no obligation to serve in the army, although they were sometimes levied during the Punic Wars.

The men in each legion were divided into four classes according to age and experience: the *triarii*, consisting of the oldest men and therefore the most experienced or veteran troops (for Rome was continually at war), who provided a reserve and a steadying influence; the *principes* and *hastati,* men in the prime of life who had been in service before, mature, tough and experienced – the main strength of any legion; and finally the *velites*, light troops or skirmishers, consisting of the poorest and youngest citizens who had little or no experience in warfare.

Although, theoretically, the legionaries were still expected to provide their own arms and armour, by the time of the Punic Wars these were normally purchased from the state, giving a uniformity of armour and weapons which was now essential because of the introduction of the manipular formation, which required that all men within the *hastati* and *principes* classes be armed and armoured in a similar fashion. As a result of the state supplying the men's armour, the citizen militia was stripped of its class character, and from then onwards the legionaries were armed and armoured very much alike, the only real distinction remaining between the heavy infantry, armed in the hoplite fashion, and the unarmoured light troops.

By around 215BC, the property qualification for army service was lowered drastically from 11,000 *asses* to 4,000. This meant a substantial number of the *proletarii* were suddenly eligible for service in the legions, possibly as many as between 75,000 and 100,000 men. The *proletarii* had been levied for service in the past, mainly to provide rowers for the navy, but occasionally to serve in the army in times of grave danger. On these occasions they were armed at public expense and served in non-regular units quite separate from the legionary order of battle. It is even possible that the *proletarii* were levied prior to Cannae, when six new legions were raised, for the senate is hardly likely to have resorted to recruiting slaves, criminals and youths of 16 and younger when many thousands of adult *proletarii* citizens were still available.

COLONIAL AND ALLIED CONTINGENTS

Though Roman garrisons were established at strategic points in allied lands and Roman colonies, after the fourth century BC the land belonging to the allied states was seldom encroached upon. The allies were, however, expected to provide troops organised on Roman lines and grouped alongside a Roman legion to form a consular

army. The allies did not have to pay for their soldiers' food and weapons, and when called upon to provide troops in excess of their treaty obligations, they received special payments from Rome. In this way Rome was able to field a substantially greater number of men than her limited manpower would have allowed.

After Rome's victory over the Latins in 338BC, a new type of Roman citizenship was introduced. This was the *civitas sine suffragio* (citizenship without the vote), a status whereby the holder was liable for taxation and military service but could not participate in Roman political affairs or hold office. These grants hugely increased available manpower, but Rome pursued another policy that must also have had the same effect. This was the appropriation of some of the land of a number of defeated opponents. Land confiscation allowed the settlement of Roman citizens – citizens who may previously have been too poor to be liable for Roman service under the Servian system. But now, with their new land, they would become sufficiently wealthy to qualify for military service.

When legionaries were recruited at the beginning of each year, recruiting officers were also despatched to the Latin colonies and allied cities of Italy to ensure that their contingents were up to strength. In 218BC the 30 Latin colonies, ranging from Placentia (Piacenza) and Cremona in the north to Brundisium (Brindisi) in the south, could supply 80,000 infantry and 5,000 cavalry. The Italian allies, all other states in the Italian peninsula under Roman control, could provide another 250,000 infantry and 26,000 cavalry. This gave a total manpower of over 600,000 men.

LEFT The Romans made their mark on their colonies through construction and engineering. This road was built by Roman soldiers in Andalucia, Spain, in 206BC. (Photo by PHAS/UIG via Getty Images)

The actual proportion of Roman citizens to allies varied from campaign to campaign, but during the Second Punic War it was never less than 1:1, and sometimes a greater proportion of allies was provided. It is also probable that during that war Rome relied more heavily on the Latin colonies than on her Latin allies: not one of these colonies went over to the Carthaginians – not even after Cannae, when many of the Italian allies changed sides – and this provided Rome with a series of reliable strongholds running the length and breadth of Italy throughout the war.

It is difficult to tell how the contingents from the colonies and allies were organised and armed. The various contingents were commanded by their own officers, and each 'legion' was under the overall command of three Roman officers called *praefecti*, who were nominated by the consuls. It is reasonably certain that the men were organised and armed very much in the Roman fashion, for it was normal practice to have Roman and allied legions arrayed side by side, which would have made the army difficult to control, and rendered the Roman legions' method of fighting much less effective, if the legions were organised and armed differently. This is particularly true of the battles of Zama in 202BC and Great Plains in 193BC, where the interaction of the three lines would have been totally ineffective, if not impossible, if the various contingents had not been organised and armed in a similar manner.

MERCENARIES

Mercenaries were employed by the Roman army, as ways of building up manpower, and for their particular military skills. After the disastrous Roman defeat at Trebia in 218BC, in the first major battle of the Second Punic War, the preparations for the next campaign included an appeal for help to King Hiero of Syracuse, who, according to Livy, sent '1,000 archers and slingers, a force well adapted to cope with Moors and

Baliares and other tribes which fought with missiles'. The battle of Lake Trasimene in June 217BC therefore may have seen the debut of the archer in the Roman army.

After the fall of the Carthaginian stronghold of Cartagena in Spain to Scipio Africanus in 209BC, the Romans gradually recruited more and more mercenaries – Celts, Spanish cavalry and infantry and, of course, the famous Balearic slingers. For the battle of Zama in 202BC the Romans also obtained many Numidian allies, both infantry and cavalry.

ROMAN MILITARY REFORM

The first Roman army was probably made up of bands of warriors, each under the command of a nobleman, or a particularly skilled and brave warrior, defending the city from the tribes that surrounded it, as well as pushing back the borders by fighting neighbouring peoples for control of their land. These warriors would have fought as individuals, and although their successes were often to the benefit of the larger group, personal gain and glory must have motivated many of them. Just a few centuries later, the Roman army was involved in battles being fought with tens of thousands of troops on both sides, and complex strategies that required a detailed knowledge of set pieces. So how did a band of warriors become one of the most highly organised and well-trained fighting forces in history? The answer is, by constant reform.

THE HOPLITE PHALANX

The earliest possible reliable information concerning the size and organisation of the earliest Roman army describes how it was recruited from three 'tribes'. This is because Roman society was at some early stage divided into three tribes and 30 *curiae*.

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

The Roman republican system was intended to prevent any individual or group within the state from gaining overwhelming and permanent power. The Republic's senior executive officers or magistrates, the most senior of whom were the two consuls, held power (*imperium*) for a single year, after which they returned to civilian life. A mixture of custom and law prevented any individual being elected to the same office in successive years, or at a young age, and in fact it was rare for the consulship to be held more than twice by any man. Former magistrates and the pick of the wealthiest citizens in the state formed the Senate, a permanent council that advised the magistrates and also supervised much of the business of government, for instance, despatching and receiving embassies.

The Roman political arena was fiercely competitive, as senators pursued a career that brought them both civil and military responsibilities, sometimes simultaneously. It was very rare for men standing for election to advocate any specific policies, and there was nothing in any way equivalent to modern political parties within the Senate. Each aristocrat instead tried to represent himself as a capable man, ready to cope with whatever task the Republic required of him, be it leading an army or building an aqueduct. Men paraded their past achievement and – since often before election they personally had done little – the achievements of past generations of their family. Vast sums of money were lavished on the electorate, especially in the form of games, gladiator shows, feasts and the building of great monuments. This gave great advantages to a small core of established and exceptionally wealthy families who, as a result, tended to dominate the senior magistracies. The consuls commanded in the most important wars, and in Rome military glory always counted for more than any other achievement.

However, in the late second century BC the system began to break down. Rome had expanded rapidly, but the huge profits of conquest had not been distributed evenly, so a few families benefited enormously. The gap between the richest and poorest in the Senate widened, and the most wealthy were able to spend lavishly to promote their own and their family's electoral success. It became increasingly expensive to pursue a political career, a burden felt as much by members of very old but now modestly wealthy families as by those outside the political elite. Such men could only succeed by borrowing vast sums of money, hoping to repay these debts once they achieved the highest offices. The risk of failure, which would thus bring financial as well as political ruin, could make such men desperate. At the same time, men from the richest and most prestigious families saw opportunities to have even more distinguished careers than their ancestors by flouting convention and trying to build up massive blocs of supporters. Both types were inclined to act as *populares*, a pejorative term employed by critics to signify men who appealed to the poorer citizens for support by promising them entertainment, subsidised or free food, or grants of land.

In addition to internal strife within the Senate, tension was caused by the fact that Italy's economy and society had been changed by Roman expansion and the influx of huge numbers of slaves. The population of Rome itself had swollen to 1,000,000 by the end of the first century BC, a high proportion of them without steady employment, and this produced a dangerous instability.

The word *curiae* comes from the Latin for 'assembly of armed men'. Each tribe appears to have contributed 1,000 men. There were horsemen in this early army, but true cavalry probably did not exist at this time. The first really major change to this army must have been the adoption of hoplite tactics in the sixth century. The original hoplites were Greek, from the seventh century, and were armed spearmen who fought as a group in tightly packed lines, usually about eight ranks deep – a phalanx. Hoplite tactics soon spread to Etruria, where their use is confirmed in a wide variety of contemporary artwork. From Etruria, this new form of warfare spread to Rome and the other Latins.

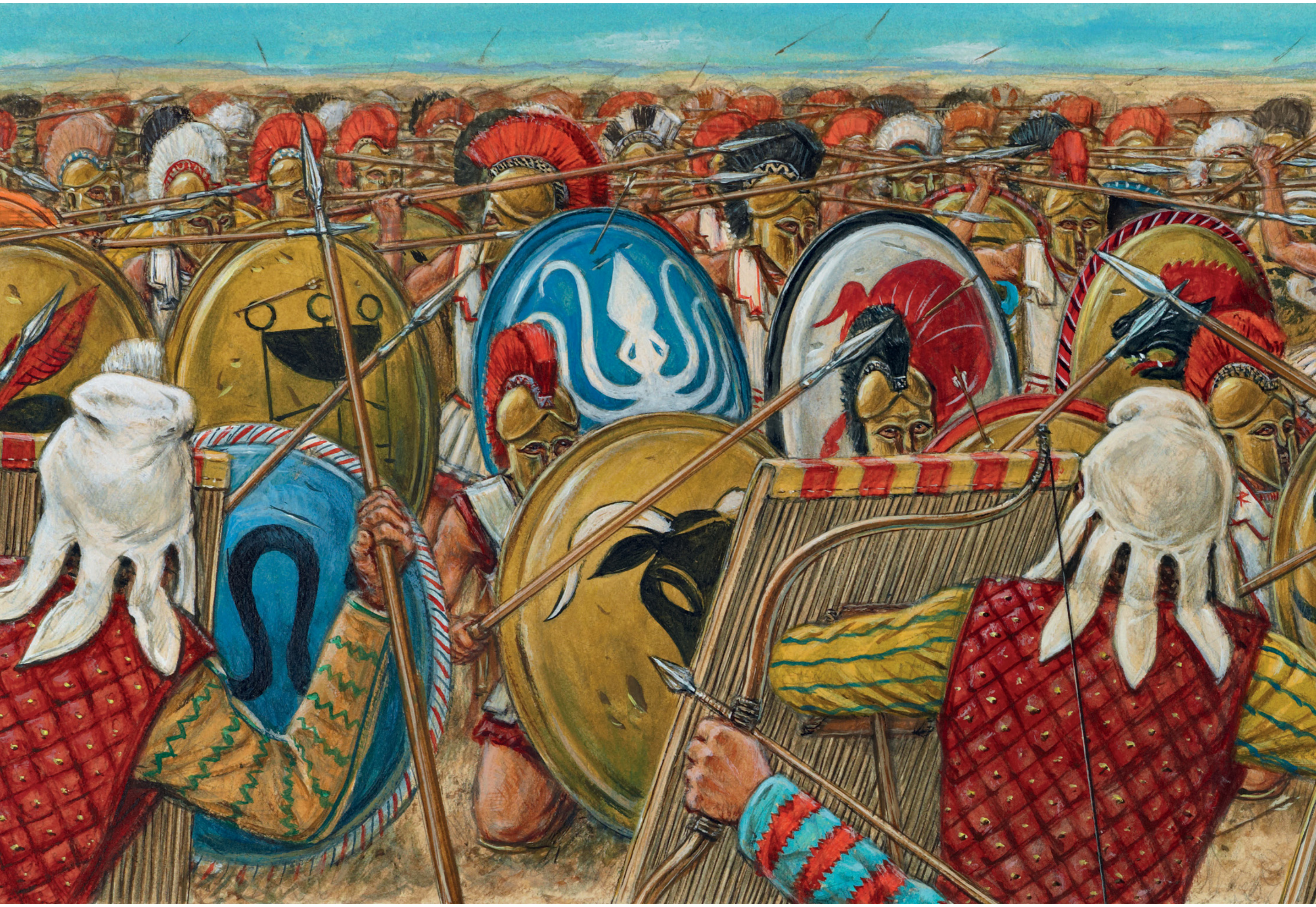
The introduction of hoplite tactics to Rome is associated in Roman historical tradition with Servius Tullius, as part of his major changes in the organisation of Rome, in which he divided society into five classes, divided by wealth. Each of the five newly created classes had to contribute centuries of men to fight. The centuries who fought using hoplite tactics were drawn from the wealthiest class. The cavalry were drawn from this wealthy class too, due to the high cost of horses – however, the number of cavalry remained very small, and it is unlikely that Rome possessed any true force of cavalry before the last decades of the fifth century BC. The middling classes were more lightly armed, and members of the poorest class were exempt due to the cost of arming themselves. The hoplite army of Servius Tullius had a strength of 4,000 and was later augmented to 6,000 at the end of the fifth century BC.

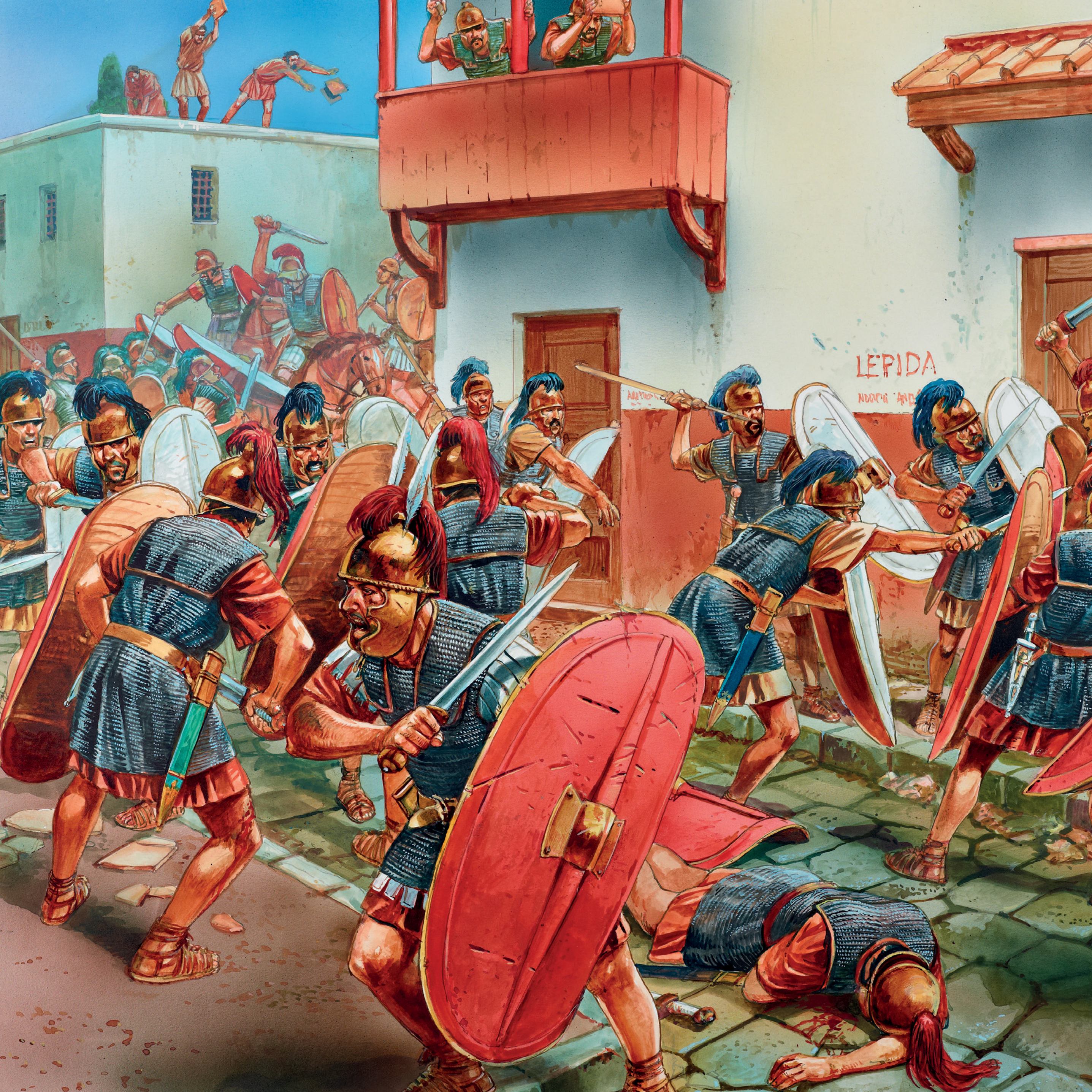
MANIPULAR WARFARE

Whilst hoplite warfare remained dominant from the middle of the sixth century BC down through the fourth in Latium and many areas of Italy, at some point during the fourth century BC the Roman hoplite phalanx was completely abandoned, and replaced by the much more flexible 'manipular' formation. Essentially, the manipular formation consisted of a number of lines of infantry, each line made up of blocks of troops or maniples (which translates literally as 'handfuls') with wide spaces separating the maniples, enabling them to advance or withdraw independently of the movement of the battle-line as a whole. In addition to this flexibility of manoeuvre, each line of maniples could be armed differently. Some historians think this reform was as a result of the massive crushing defeat experienced by Rome at the hands of the Gallic Celts.

Dionysius, writing in the first century BC, and Plutarch, writing in the first century AD, certainly believed that some form of tactical change was employed by

RIGHT This depiction of the Greek line at the battle of Plataea in 479BC illustrates the use of hoplite tactics: the Greeks drive forward in close formation behind their aspis shields, while clutching their spears, the front rank preparing to stand after riding out cavalry and archery assaults from the knee. (Adam Hook © Osprey Publishing)




LEPIDA

the Romans when the Gauls next returned. Dionysius tells how the Roman soldiers ducked down under the blows of the Gallic swords and took them on the shield, while striking at the enemies' groins with the sword. However, there is evidence to suggest that it was the wars with the Samnites that taught the Romans to abandon the phalanx. The rough terrain of central southern Italy, where the Samnite wars were mainly fought, rendered the phalanx much less effective than the more flexible formation used by the Samnites. The Samnites employed a large number of smaller and more manoeuvrable units of soldiers, equipped with heavy javelins and the *scutum*. By around 300BC the flexible formation of three separate lines divided into maniples was being used throughout the Roman army. The maniples were still based on the original centuries, but now reduced to between 70 and 80 men each.

Ancient sources record that after the massive Roman defeat at Cannae in 216BC there were drastic reforms in the army, the most notable of which was a complete re-organisation of the light troops. According to Polybius, writing in the second century BC, the proportion of light troops per legion was doubled – hardly the picture one usually has of the solid, sturdy, slow-moving Roman legion of predominantly heavy infantry. Another less dramatic change occurred when Scipio Africanus took Cartagena in 209BC. A considerable number of Spanish sword-smiths were captured, and set to work producing the excellent *gladius Hispaniensis*, for which they were famous. This weapon may possibly have been copied by the Romans at an earlier date, but they had never been able to achieve

LEFT In this scene in the town of Valencia in Spain during the civil wars in 75BC, legionaries loyal to Pompey are engaged in bitter street fighting with those of Quintus Sertorius. Here, legionaries and cavalry in the two armies are using the long *gladius Hispaniensis* both to thrust and to chop. (Peter Dennis © Osprey Publishing) the extremely high-quality forging which was the main value of the weapon: now Scipio not only had Spanish smiths, but he forced them to teach his own smiths their secrets. Consequently, the Roman army which Scipio led to Africa in 204BC for his campaigns against the Carthaginians and their Numidian allies was entirely equipped with the true *gladius Hispaniensis* and had been thoroughly trained and exercised by Scipio in its correct use. The new sword almost certainly contributed to Scipio's African victories, but prior to its widespread introduction to the Roman army around 200BC, Scipio's African legions would probably have been the only Roman troops using the true *gladius Hispaniensis.*

A SNAPSHOT OF THE ROMAN ARMY AT THE TIME OF THE PUNIC WARS

The Romans of this period were predominantly a rural society, and the loosening of their strict, simplistic code of behaviour had hardly begun. The Roman *paterfamilias* ruled his family as an autocrat, instilling obedience, loyalty and integrity with a severity approaching the institutionalised training of the Spartan youth.

The result of this upbringing, upheld and fortified by the rigorous demands of public opinion, was that the Romans displayed high standards and set themselves an ideal of virtue based on willpower, self-restraint, a seriousness devoid of frivolity, perseverance and a binding sense of duty to the family, social group, or military unit, all established in the hierarchy of state authority. The importance of the individual was subordinated to his corporate responsibilities, and a willingness to sacrifice his own interests or even his life for the good of his group was accepted as the normal standard of personal conduct.

This gave rise to a pragmatic, dour and persistent breed of men, supported by obedient and respectful wives, who occupied themselves with the running of their households and the rearing of children. Bound together by a powerful moral code of reciprocal loyalty, they were hard-working, brave through training, and hardened mentally and physically by the vicissitudes of nature and a life of laborious toil. They made hardy, courageous and disciplined soldiers, whose strength was tempered only by superstition and the usual measure of human failings.

RECRUITMENT AND SERVICE

The 'standing army' of Rome was four legions plus their cavalry – a total of 20,000 men at most – yet her adult male population has been estimated at 325,000 in 215BC, of whom some 240,000 would have been available for military service. This does not include the *proletarii,* who were below the minimum wealth required for service, and who were normally employed in the navy in time of war. Rome did indeed field considerably larger armies – a maximum of 25 legions after Cannae in 216BC, a total of at least 120,000 men – yet even this was only half her potential military strength.

Under normal conditions, as outlined above, all males between the ages of 18 and 46 who satisfied the proper criteria were eligible for military service and were recruited into the cavalry or infantry. Under the levy system, the legionaries were enrolled for the year, but would normally have been mustered for only one short campaign, after which they returned home. When the men were selected for service the next year they would have formed completely new legions, so the legions of this early period had no lasting identity as did those of Imperial times. However, during the Punic Wars, as the campaigns moved further and further from Rome, the length of service necessary rose accordingly, and it became increasingly difficult to recruit men and hold them in the ranks – being farmers and businessmen, reliant on these concerns for their main income, the men were not keen on extended periods of service and were forever agitating for their discharge.

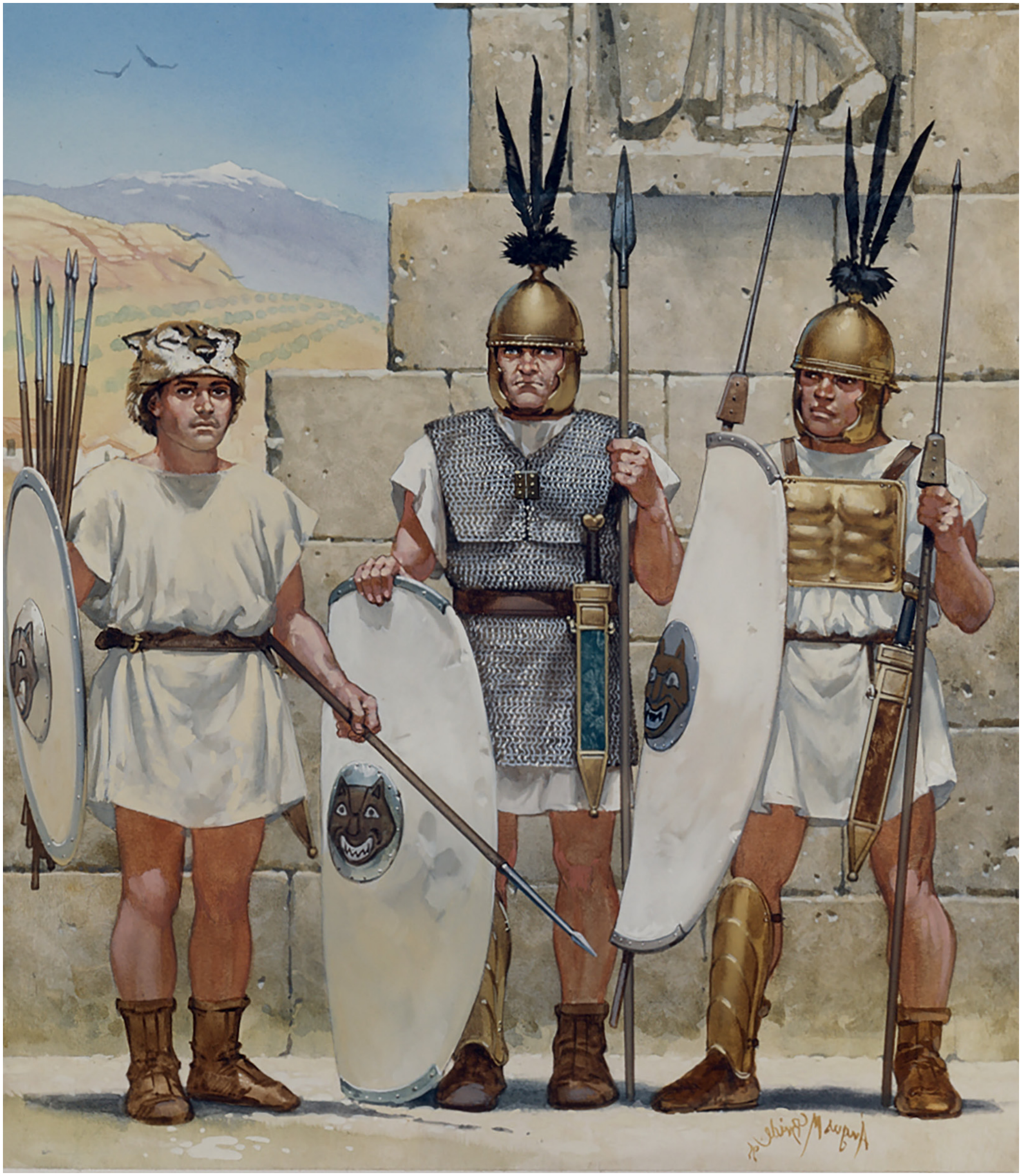
By the Second Punic War, legions were being mobilised for an entire year at a time and it was necessary to introduce a rota system, with front-line troops being regularly replaced with men from home. The annual levy was then reduced merely to bringing the legions up to strength, and some kind of permanent legion did exist, though its content was constantly changing. The rota system was another reason why the total manpower of Rome was never utilised at any one time.

Military service was regarded as a mark of honour, without which public recognition and advancement were virtually impossible, especially since it was only after ten years' duty that a man could hold public office.

ORGANISATION AND DEPLOYMENT

A legion consisted of some 4,000 infantry, except in times of special danger, when the number was increased to 5,000. The legion was divided into ten maniples of *hastati*, ten maniples of *principes*, and ten maniples of *triarii*. A maniple contained two centuries of between 70 and 80 men, giving a total of from 140 to 160 men. When deployed for battle, the legion formed three lines of *hastati, principes* and *triarii*. The *hastati* formed the front line, armed with two *pila* (javelins – see below), a large oval shield and a short sword, and wearing helmet, cuirass and possibly greaves.

RIGHT Roman legionaries in Spain during the Second Punic War, showing (from left to right) a *hastatus,* a *triarius* and a *veles* (plural *velites*). (Angus McBride © Osprey Publishing)



The *principes* formed the second line, armed and armoured in a similar fashion. The *triarii* made up the third line, kneeling, ready to move forward and fill any gaps in the lines ahead of them. The *velites* fought as skirmishers initially, but then normally returned to the rear rank and joined the reserve, providing the spearmen with missile back-up if necessary. In addition each legion also had 300 cavalry, or *equites*, attached to it, divided into ten *turmae* of 30 men, which in turn were divided into three groups of ten, each commanded by a *decurion* with an *optio* as second in command. The cavalry were deployed on the flanks.

There were about 100 metres between each of the lines of infantry. In a consular army the four legions might be deployed with the two Roman ones in the centre and the allies on the flanks, with the combined cavalry (in a maximum depth of eight ranks) on the extreme flanks, or Roman and allied legions might be alternated.

Each line of infantry was divided into its separate maniples, with a gap slightly wider than a maniple's frontage between each pair of maniples. The maniples of the *principes* covered the gaps in the line of *hastati*, and the *triarii* covered those in the line of *principes*, creating the so-called 'chequer-board' formation. It is most likely that the legionaries in each maniple were drawn up in open order, with a frontage of two metres per man, and that each successive rank covered the gaps in the rank in front. The number of ranks per maniple varied considerably, depending on the depth of the enemy's formation, and might range from six to 12, with a norm of eight or ten. Open order was necessary for the discharge of the *pila*, and for the men to be able to fight in their traditional manner as swordsmen once at close quarters. The men could change to close order by every other rank advancing into the gaps in the rank in front of it: this would have been necessary when on the defensive, receiving a missile attack, and possibly when receiving a charge. Open order in the sword-fighting phase would enable

GLADIUS HISPANIENSIS

The Spanish sword was probably responsible for many victories during this period, since the side who favoured it often seemed to succeed in battle. The sword was made from exceptionally pure Spanish iron, and the manufacture process was a highly skilled job, and included cold hammering – this made it very strong and very sharp. An artillery manual written in around 250BC describes the Spanish sword blade thus:

> *When they wish to test the excellence of these [swords] they grasp the hilt in their right hand and the end of the blade in the left: then, laying it horizontally on their heads, they pull down at each end until they touch their shoulders. Next they let go sharply, removing both hands. When released, it straightens itself out again and so resumes its original shape, without retaining a suspicion of a bend. Though they repeat this frequently, the swords remain straight.*

During his campaigns in Spain, Hannibal noted the effect of these swords in the hands of his mercenaries, and adopted them for his own troops. In fact, the Carthaginian victory at Cannae is often attributed in part to the superiority of the Spanish sword over the short swords of Greek origin still being used by the Romans. Scipio the Elder noted the quality of the Spanish swords when he landed at Ampurias in 128BC, and Scipio Africanus, after he took Cartagena in 209BC, captured numerous Spanish sword-smiths there and forced them to manufacture weapons for his own troops. The Romans called this sword *gladius Hispaniensis* – sword of Spain – and it was widely in use in the Roman legions by 200BC, when it was used against the Macedonians.

tired front-rank men to fall back as they killed their man, being replaced instantly by the man behind and to one side of their position. Sword fighting would have been restricted to stabbing motions from behind the shield when in close order, as there would have been insufficient room to swing the sword or to use the shield offensively.

WEAPONS

The main weapon, and therefore the most important, of the legions was the *pilum* (javelin), of which there were two distinct types: a light one with a socketed head, which had a maximum range of about 30 metres in the hands of an expert, and a heavier one with an overall length of three metres, of which half consisted of a barbed iron head on a long, thin iron shaft. The spear of the *triarii* was about four metres long. The *velites* used light, short javelins, and the cavalry had a Greek spear with a pointed iron ferrule which could be used as a weapon if the spear was broken in combat. All infantry and cavalry carried the short iron sword, about 60cm long by 5cm wide, with double edge and an obtuse point. It was carried in a scabbard on the right side in the Greek fashion.

The *pila* were discharged at close range – the light one first, then the heavy one – during the advance to attack. In the confusion caused by this hail of missiles, which not only inflicted casualties in the enemy's line, but also rendered many opponents' shields useless because of the *pila* impaling them, the legionaries charged the final few yards and attacked with sword and shield. The *velites* would have withdrawn through the gaps in the lines of *hastati* before the discharge of the *pila,* either retiring to wait in reserve with the *triarii*, or, if necessary, moving outwards to the flanks between the lines of infantry, to reinforce the cavalry.

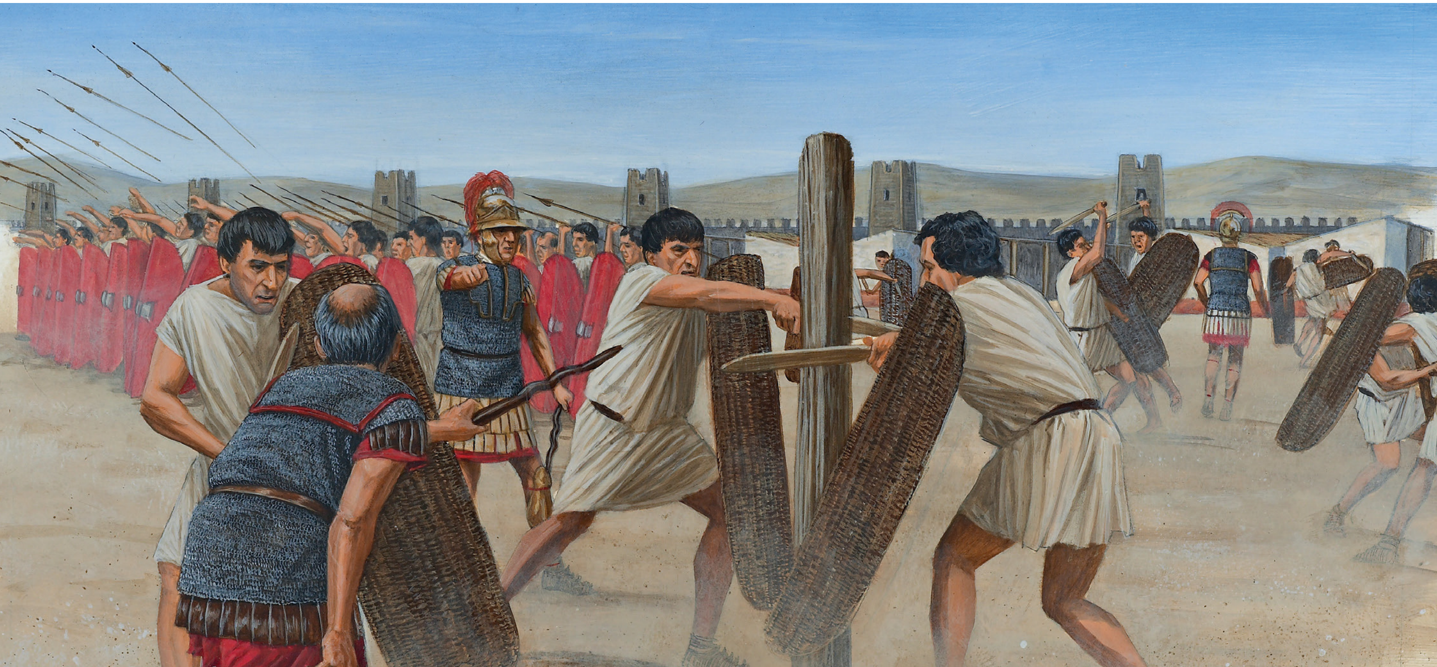
The Romans also made extensive use of siege and artillery weapons, which had been part of their arsenal since around 282BC. This arsenal included rams, ballistae and catapults: the ratio of heavy catapults and ballistae to light was about 1:6.

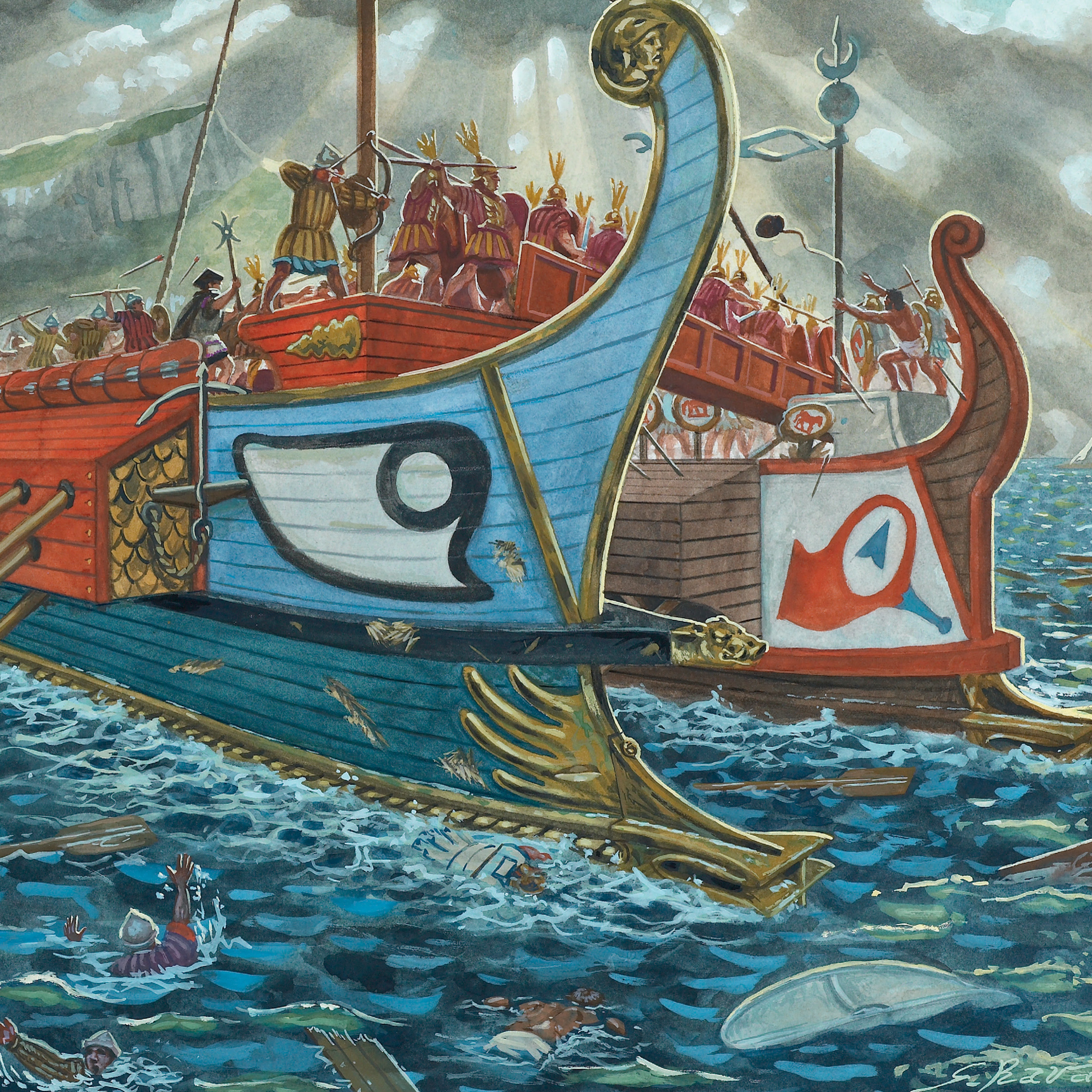
RIGHT Roman swordsmanship was a fully developed art with a comprehensive training system based on repeated drills. Here legionaries in camp outside Numantia, Spain, are undergoing weapons training under the instruction of their centurions. Some of them are fighting in pairs with wooden swords, while others practice casting 'live' *pila* at bales of straw. (Seán Ó'Brógáin © Osprey Publishing)

THE ROMAN NAVY

The history of the Roman navy is strange indeed. Following the third treaty between Rome and Carthage, drawn up in 279BC at the time of Pyrrhus' campaign in Italy, Carthaginian naval supremacy had been recognised: they would aid the Romans by sea should the need arise. The Roman conquest of southern Italy had been achieved with just an army, and no attempt had been made to reduce the coastal cities using a combined land and sea assault, or even a blockade. Eventually, however, the Romans recognised their maritime deficiency and with their usual thoroughness set about putting things right. A Carthaginian quinquereme (ship with five banks of oars) which had run aground during a naval brush was dismantled and used as a model for the construction of an entire Roman fleet.

The recorded facts relate how 100 quinqueremes and 20 triremes (ships with three banks of oars) were ordered to be ready in two months. While the workmen

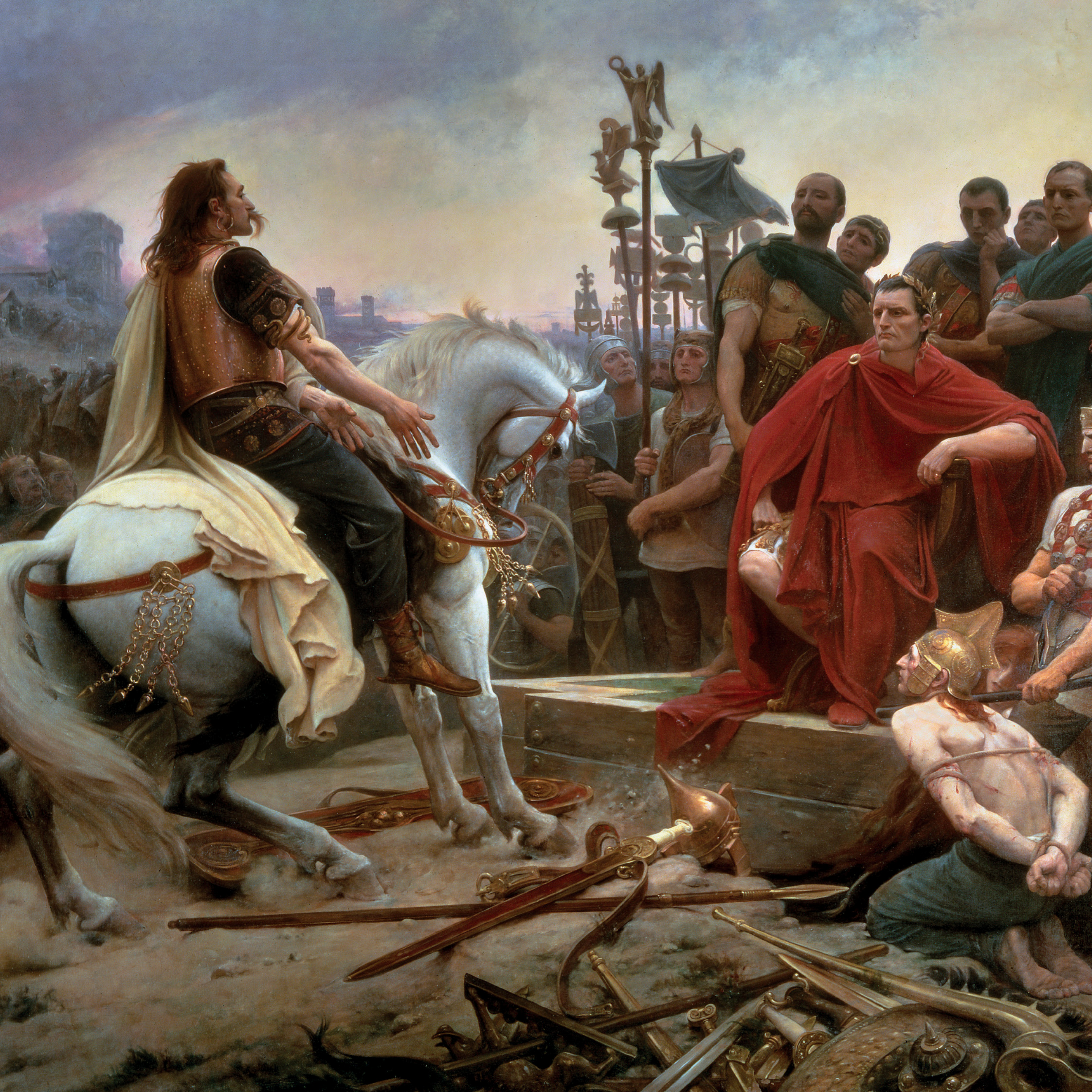



G. Rava

were busy building and fitting out the ships, the recruiting and training of the sailors proceeded apace. Skeleton ship frames were constructed along the shore and the rowers drilled under the command of their officers. It was a stupendous undertaking involving some 35,000 men, suggesting a considerable amount of planning, with the crews being recruited, the timber felled and shaped, the skeleton frames constructed and the ships themselves all completed before the two months' training, including a period at sea, actually began. Even so, it is small wonder that in the first encounters with the Carthaginians, the Roman navy proved to be hopelessly inadequate.

To compensate for their lack of nautical expertise, however, the Romans introduced the *corvus* ('raven') – a technical innovation that exploited their legionaries' aptitude for close-quarter fighting. The *corvus* was a boarding bridge which could be hoisted up from a 12-foot pillar of wood, and swung around in the required direction. At the end of the bridge was a large pointed spike (the *corvus* itself) which, when released, drove itself into the deck of the opposing vessel, locking the two ships together. Then the legionaries could storm aboard and slaughter the near-defenceless crews. However, as useful as the *corvus* was for enabling the Romans to engage in close combat, it did have the side effect of rendering the Roman warships unstable. It was therefore abandoned around 255BC.

LEFT This scene shows Roman and Carthaginian quinqueremes clashing in the last battle of the First Punic War. The Romans are using the famous *corvus* to board the other ship. (Giuseppe Rava © Osprey Publishing)



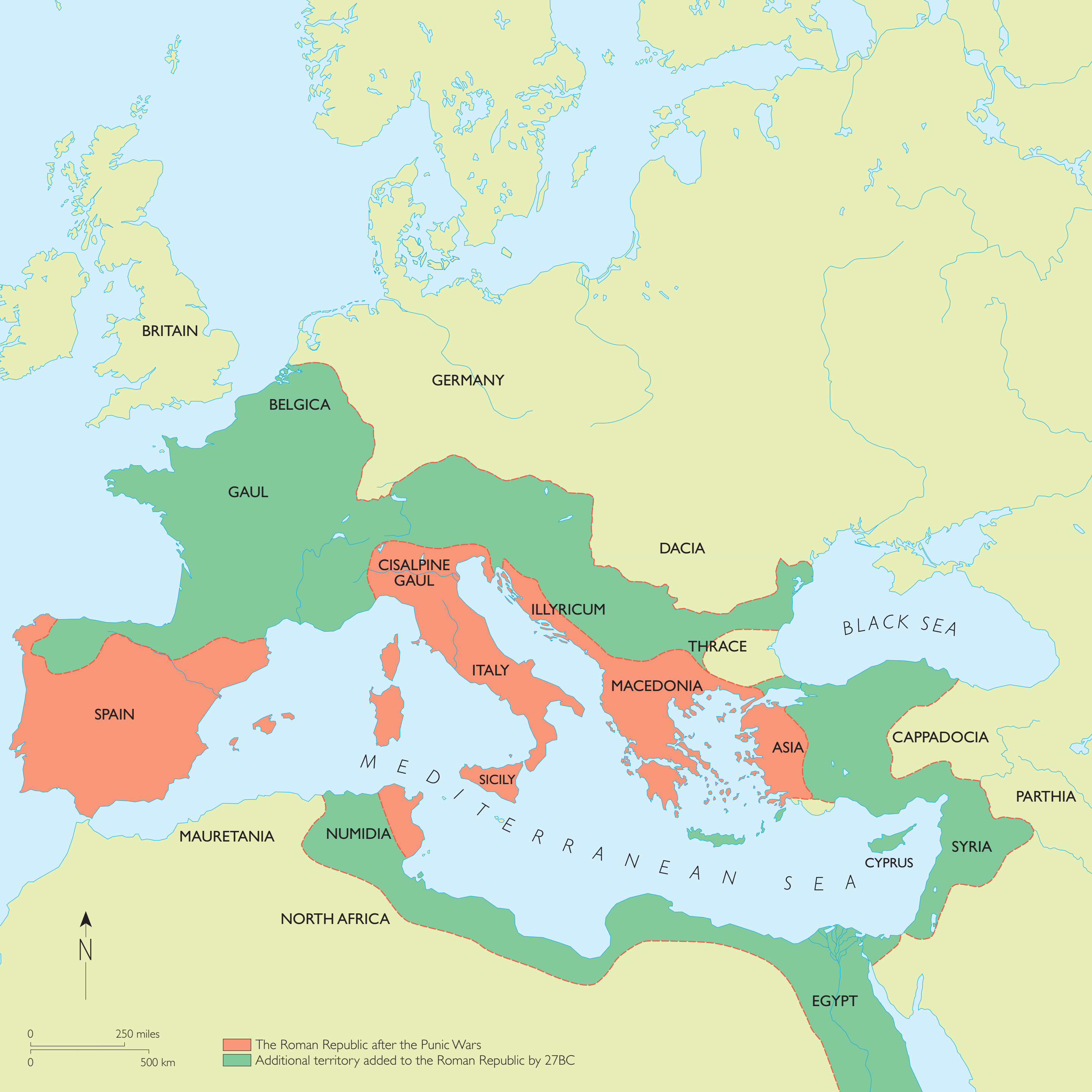
THE LATE REPUBLIC 150–27BC

Dominating the entire Mediterranean world, Rome continued to expand her frontiers through the superiority of her armies. At home, however, the government was showing signs of strain, designed as it was for a regional republic, not an international superpower.

Rome's guardian soldiers would soon appear in the city in a far more menacing form…

By the end of the Third Punic War in 146BC, Rome had the bulk of Europe and some of Africa already sewn into the tapestry of her lands. Rome dominated the

LEFT Vercingetorix, leader of the Gallic rebellion, throws down his arms at the feet of Julius Caesar after having lost definitively at the city of Alesia. Painting by Lionel Noel Royer, Crozatier Museum, Le Puy en Velay, France. (Photo by Leemage/Corbis via Getty Images)


BRITAIN
GERMANY
BELGICA
GAUL
DACIA
CISALPINE GAUL
ILLYRICUM
BLACK SEA
THRACE
ITALY
MACEDONIA
SPAIN
CAPPADOCIA
ASIA
SICILY
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
PARTHIA
MAURETANIA
NUMIDIA
SYRIA
CYPRUS
NORTH AFRICA
N
EGYPT
0 250 miles
0 500 km
🟥 The Roman Republic after the Punic Wars
🟩 Additional territory added to the Roman Republic by 27BC

entire Mediterranean world, having defeated with ease the successor kingdoms that had emerged from the break-up of Alexander the Great's empire.

However, Rome was still a republic, organised as a regional, not a world, power, and sooner or later the wealth and power gained from conquering new lands would become impossible to control by a government created to lead a small fledgling republic. The stability and unity of purpose which had so characterised Roman political life for centuries began to break down. Politicians started to employ violent means to achieve their ends, the disputes escalating until they became civil wars fought on a massive scale. These violent clashes between legions constituted some of the major conflicts of the period, though there were still plenty of foreign wars taking place to keep the legions busy abroad. The impact of these foreign wars on the stability and development of the Republic are also marked factors of this period.

FOREIGN FIGHTING

THE NUMANTINE WARS

Rome's first significant foreign threat during this period came from the territory of Numantia in early Spain. The Celtiberians had many times resisted Roman control in the region, repeatedly beating back Roman attempts to take over Numantia, the town marking the centre of Celtiberian resistance to Roman rule. The Celtiberians had achieved many victories against the Roman army, and were even responsible for a serious decline in morale, as the length of service of Roman soldiers in Spain became greater and greater, with no immediate sign of achieving the victory that Rome so badly wanted. Scipio Aemilianus, the adoptive grandson of Scipio Africanus, was eventually given control of the Roman army in Spain in 134BC, and he set about restoring the army to previous levels of discipline and mental and physical strength, before embarking on the decisive clash with the Numantians. Eventually, an eight-month siege of the town in 133BC, led by Scipio Aemilianus, sealed its fate, and its starving inhabitants could no longer hold back the forces of Rome. Numantia was razed to the ground, and those inhabitants who had not died from the siege, or taken their own lives to avoid Roman capture, were either sold into slavery, or forced to fight under Scipio to gain more wealth for the very power that had caused its destruction. Numantian lands were divided amongst its neighbours, to avoid any single power becoming too strong, and Scipio added 'Numantinus' to his own name.

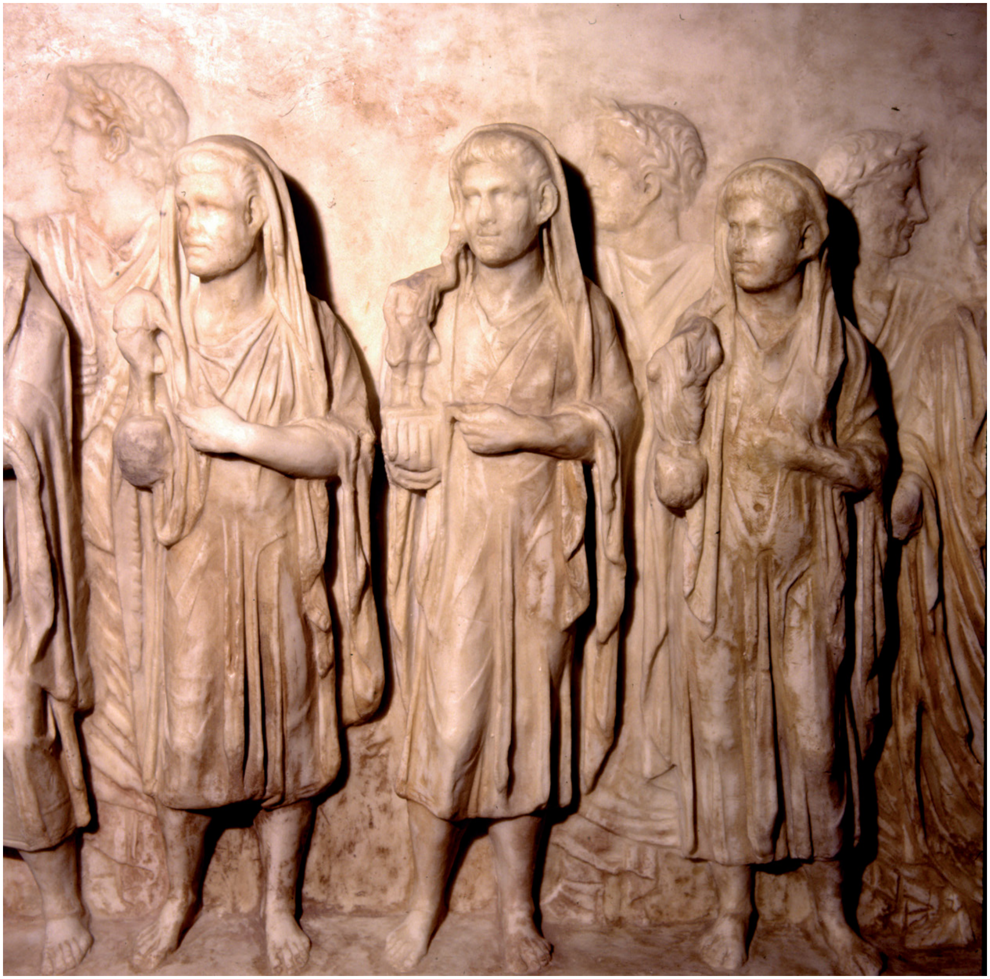
However, Celtiberian resistance to Rome was not completely extinguished by this savage destruction of its major city, and it was not until the rule of Augustus, in 19BC, that the last Celtiberian uprising was successfully crushed.

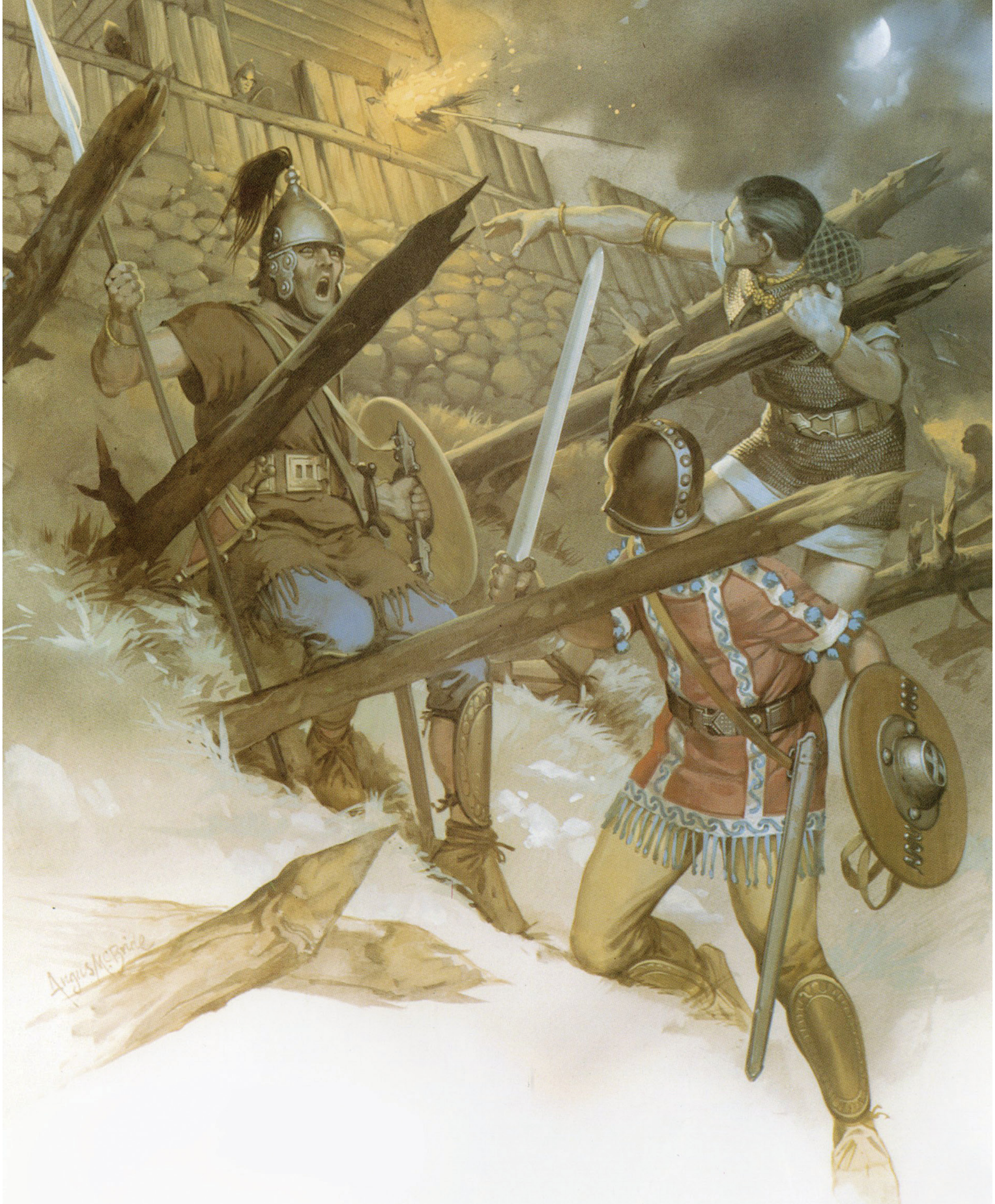
THE MITHRIDATIC WARS

If Hannibal had been the nemesis of Rome at the end of the third century BC, the first century saw Mithridates taking on this role.

Mithridates was the king of Pontus in north-eastern Asia Minor, and his rise to power warned of his ruthlessness, involving, as it did, the murder of both his brother

RIGHT A stone carving of Roman senators in procession. The Senate was the governing council of the Roman Republic, and the role of senator was much sought-after by citizens of Rome, as it brought with it power, fame and wealth. The Senate was supposedly designed to keep a check on any one family or individual becoming too powerful, but in reality the Senate contained many members of old patrician families of Rome who had achieved their position through unashamedly self-promoting, and employing nepotism. (© R Sheridan/ AAA Collection Ltd)





and mother, and the taking of his sister as his bride. As was inevitable of such a driven ruler, Mithridates' policies were aggressively expansionist, and he had Roman lands in Asia in his sights. In 89BC, Mithridates invaded the Roman Asian province of Pergamum, at a loss of far more than just land to the Romans. The Greeks who had been living under Roman rule saw a quick opportunity for defection, and just as Hannibal had done in the Second Punic War, Mithridates boosted his manpower with these disaffected ex-subjects of Rome, keen for revenge. In 88BC, Mithridates took Athens from Roman control, and led attacks on Rhodes. His zeal to rid Asia Minor of Romans knew no bounds, and Rome was about to get a taste of the lengths to which Mithridates would go. He ordered the execution of every Roman citizen in Asia Minor and the surrounding areas, and over 80,000 Romans were put to their death in the wholesale slaughter.

If Rome had been angry at the loss of her provinces, it was nothing compared to the horror and wrath she felt at this massacre. In 87BC Lucius Cornelius Sulla, a general and former consul, having fought with his mentor Gaius Marius for the command against Mithridates, took five legions and marched to Athens. A bitter two-year siege of the town resulted in its eventual surrender and recapture by the Romans, and Archelaus, Mithridates' general, retreated with his forces to Macedonia where he met and joined up with another Mithridatic army. By the time Sulla's forces met Archelaus' army again in 86BC, the Romans were outnumbered three to one. Sulla overcame the differences in strength through his great skill in battlefield

LEFT A depiction of one of the desperate attacks on the Roman encircling fortification, late in the siege of Numantia, by the starving defenders. The man on the left wears a helmet of the popular Montefortino type. (Angus McBride © Osprey Publishing) command at the battle of Chaeronea. Sulla routed the Mithridatic army, which fled as a force of only 10,000 from the original 120,000 who had started the battle.

Sulla instead stayed in Asia Minor and entered into negotiation with Mithridates for the ending of hostilities – he wanted rid of the king of Pontus, so he would be free to devote his energies to enemies in Rome. Mithridates was ordered to give up the lands he had seized (no great hardship since most of them had already been taken back by the Roman forces), pay a tribute, release the prisoners of war, and provide Sulla with a large fleet and spoils with which to return to Rome. In return, Mithridates would be allowed to return to his original lands as a friend of the Roman people, exactly as he had been before he had invaded Roman provinces in Asia.

Sulla, backed by a considerable force, now trained his sights on Rome, leaving behind L. Licinius Murena to take care of Asia for Roman interests. Murena reopened hostilities with Mithridates in 83BC, against the terms of the peace settlement, but after a few Roman defeats, this short war ended in 81BC, and peace reigned once more between Mithridates and the Romans. This was shattered in 74BC when the king of Bithynia, Nicomedes IV, died and left his kingdom to Rome. Mithridates could not countenance a new Roman province so close to his own lands, and so he invaded Bithynia, starting the Third Mithridatic War. A series of Roman generals, starting with Lucullus, experienced defeat and victory in engagements with the Mithridatic forces, until Pompey was sent out in 66BC. Sulla had died, and Pompey was his successor in Rome, keen for military glory to cement his political fortunes. It was after his defeat by Pompey in Armenia in 63BC that Mithridates eventually took his own life, heartbroken at his betrayal by his son, who led a rebellion against him.

THE GALLIC WARS

When Julius Caesar, following his year as consul, engineered for himself the governorship of Cisalpine Gaul (northern Italy) and Dalmatia in 59BC, there was no doubt that he would conduct campaigns to enhance his military reputation and political future. When the governorship of Transalpine Gaul (southern France) was added to his command, and the Helvetii in Switzerland began a huge migration, Caesar decided to campaign in Gaul.

Over the next few years the Romans made rapid conquests throughout Gaul. Few Gallic armies were capable of resisting the disciplined and well-equipped Roman legions, and Caesar was able to draw on an increasingly large and experienced army, as well as allies from Gaul and occasionally Germany to supply him with cavalry in particular. Within three years of leading his army into Gaul, Caesar was able to pronounce that the whole province was conquered and lead his army into Germany and across the Channel to Britain, expeditions that provoked shocked admiration back in Rome.

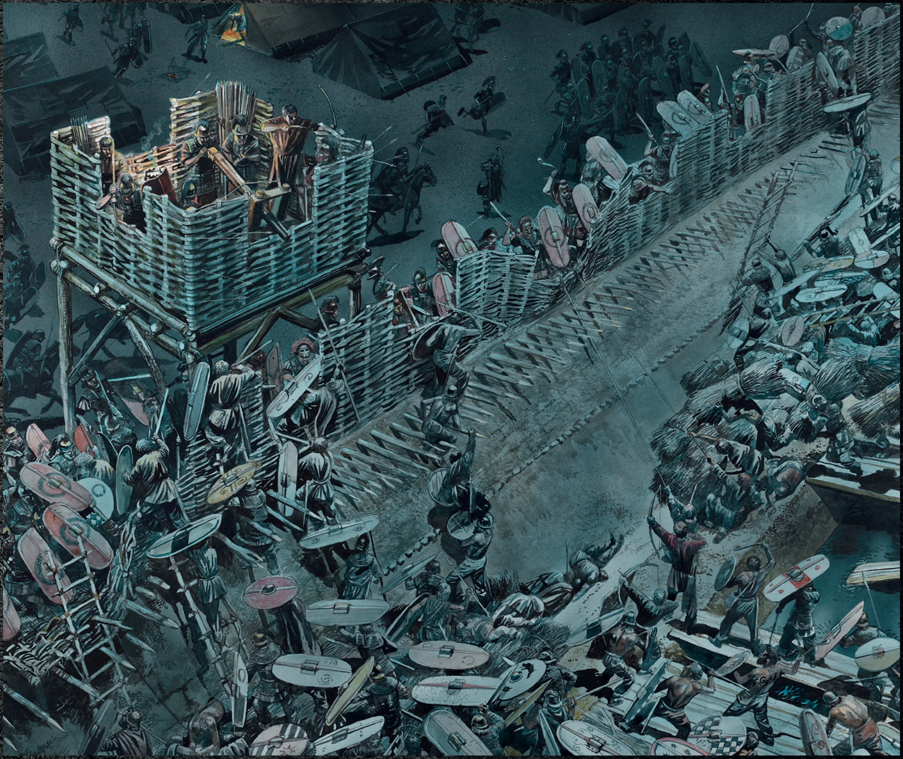
Gaul may have been conquered, but the Gauls were not. The last years of Caesar's command were spent dealing with sporadic revolts across the province, which were followed in 52BC by a major uprising. Finally the Gauls had found a leader who could unite them: Vercingetorix. It was at Alesia that the whole war in Gaul came to a climax, and when the army raised to relieve the besieged Gauls was repulsed, the war was effectively over. The relieving army dissolved and Vercingetorix surrendered. Although it was not until the reign of the first emperor, Augustus, that Gaul was properly pacified (and even after that there are indications of the occasional rumble into the mid-first century AD), the Gauls were never able to unite effectively again. Gaul became several Roman provinces, and Julius Caesar went on to fight and win a civil war.

THE LAST UPRISING OF VERCINGETORIX

Vercingetorix, the charismatic young son of Celtillus of the royal house of the Arverni, was fanatically anti-Roman, and a leader of real ability; and he was willing to use any means to his end. He built a coalition of Gallic tribes and urged a 'scorched earth' policy, so as to avoid pitched battles and sieges while cutting the Romans off from supplies. Villages were burned to the ground, wells poisoned, roads destroyed, and the countryside stripped of crops and livestock. Caesar's troops were subjected to ambush and attack from all sides, and their supply lines and stores were constantly being destroyed. Caesar besieged Gergovia near Clermont-Ferrand, and after the garrison had repulsed an attempted storming, the Gallic army was able to launch an overwhelming attack from outside the walls on the troops occupied with the siege. By the time Caesar retired from the field that night he had lost 700 men and 36 centurions – his first outright defeat in Gaul.

A major ambush followed, but Vercingetorix was unable to control his hot-headed followers. In their battle-frenzy the Gallic Celts charged anything in their path, and were methodically slaughtered in the customary manner by the superbly disciplined legions. Vercingetorix retired with his own forces to Alesia on the Seine (modern Alise-Ste-Reine). He was followed by Caesar with about 3,000 infantry and a force of mercenary Germanic cavalry. While Vercingetorix stayed inside Alesia, the centre and figurehead of Gallic resistance, Caesar made use of every resource of Roman military skill in preparing the containing defences: a complicated series of dry ditches was dug; a tributary of the Seine was diverted to fill a moat; and large areas were sewn with caltrops and 'lilies' (sharp stakes sunk in pits). Walls were built facing both inwards towards Alesia and outwards towards any would-be relieving army of Gauls; the outer rampart was all of 15 miles long. Caesar's besiegers thus occupied a ring around the town, defended front and rear.

After a month's siege the defenders of Alesia expelled the women, children, old and sick from the town to save useless mouths. They were not allowed to leave the site by the Romans, and presumably gradually perished in the no-man's land between the armies. Soon afterwards a Gallic relief army appeared outside Roman lines, and Caesar's army was subjected to attacks from both inside and outside. During one



In this reconstruction it is the dead of night and the Gauls besieged in Alesia have mounted a full-scale assault upon Caesar's encircling fortifications. Having negotiated the pitfalls and traps (designed to slow them down and keep them exposed longer to the lethal hail of missiles from the main work), the attackers have filled the inner ditch with fascines and are scaling the Roman ramparts. (Peter Dennis)

furious attack, Caesar himself finally struck the Gallic attackers in the rear with four cohorts and part of the Roman cavalry. The Gauls broke off their attempt on the wall, and those who were not cut down were taken prisoner. Disheartened, the Gallic relief army began to melt away, and on the following day Vercingetorix and his tribal chiefs were delivered up to the Romans, and the garrison's weapons handed over, while the general sat before his inner fortifications.

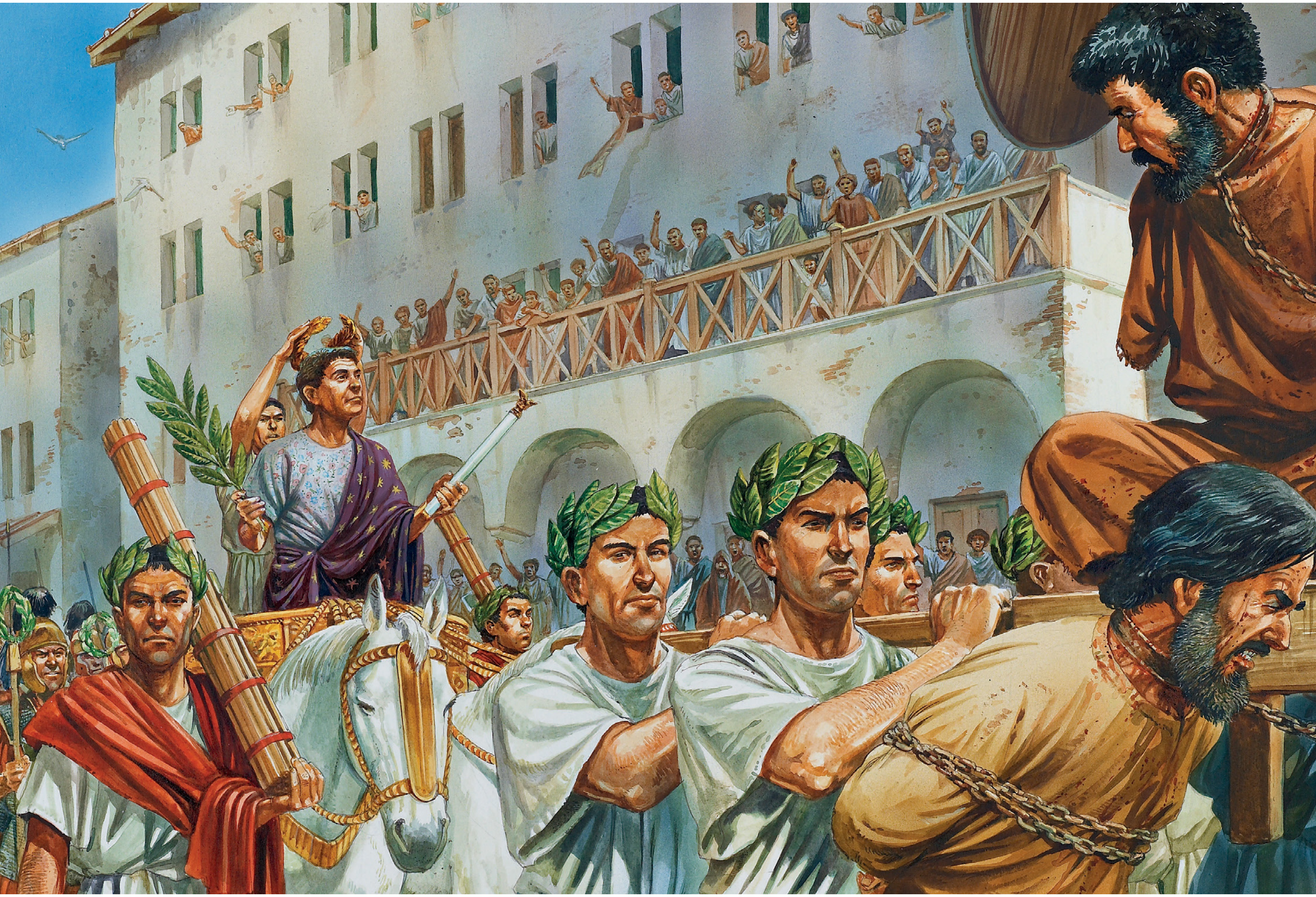
Over the next two years Gaul was brought under Caesar's control. Vercingetorix was kept in chains reserved for Caesar's eventual triumphal procession, for six long years. In 46BC his shrunken frame was dressed once more in his best armour, and after being paraded in Caesar's triumph Vercingetorix, a prince of Gaul, was ritually strangled.

CONFLICT AT HOME

MARIUS AND SULLA

In 88BC, Gaius Marius, the general renowned for carrying out important reforms of the army, and with six appointments as consul behind him, was given command of the army engaged in the wars with Mithridates. This was a key appointment for any commander, as it offered the greatest of rewards – glory. Marius was not the original recipient of this golden ticket, however. His early protégé, Lucius Cornelius Sulla, had been given the honour of the command already that year, but while he was away completing his campaigning in Italy prior to embarking on his Mithraditic campaign, the situation changed. Having drummed up huge popular support, Marius had allied himself with a tribune with an axe to grind – Publius Sulpicius Rufus – who proposed a plebiscite on replacing Sulla as the commander of the armies against Mithridates. The people voted for Marius to replace Sulla, and an envoy was sent to inform Sulla of this news. Sulla took the news badly, as his stoning to death of the envoy suggested, and set about organising his five legions to do the unthinkable – march on Rome. For the first time in her history, Rome's streets were filled with armed citizen soldiers, heading for the Senate. Through fear of violence, the Senate gave in to Sulla's demands for his opponents to be outlawed, and Marius fled to Africa. Having secured support in the Senate (as much through fear as respect), Sulla left for Greece to fight the Mithridatic Wars. With victory in

RIGHT Bust of Marius (157–86 BC), a Roman republican general during the civil war period, from the Munich Glypotek, second century BC. (Photo by CM Dixon/Print Collector/Getty Images)



Greece secured, Sulla returned to Rome to find a new Marius in charge. In Sulla's absence, Marius had seized back control, died, and his son, also called Marius, had been passed control in his place. The armies of Sulla and Marius met in bloody civil war at the Colline Gate in 82BC, and Sulla emerged the victor. For nearly two years, Sulla ruled as dictator with absolute power (an emergency magistracy concentrating power in his hands), and only laid this down when he went into voluntary retirement.

POMPEY AND CAESAR

The chaos of the civil war and the rapid collapse of the Sullan constitution after his retirement in 79BC fostered a continuation of political disorder, and eventually the renewal of open war in 49BC. This period also had a profound influence on the careers and attitudes of the main protagonists in 49–45BC. Caesar himself first rose to prominence during Sulla's dictatorship, narrowly avoiding execution by the dictator when he publicly celebrated his relation by marriage to Marius at a family funeral.

However, a far more dramatic role was played by Gnaeus Pompey, who in 83BC came to the support of Sulla at the head of three legions raised from his family's estates and veterans who had served under his late father, Pompeius Strabo. At the time Pompey was only 23 and, having never held public office, had no legal

LEFT Here Pompey celebrates a triumph in Rome following his commands against the remnants of Marius' supporters. He is wearing the traditional garb of a triumphator and is preceded by captives and spoils of war, attended by senators, magistrates and officials, and followed by his soldiers. (Peter Dennis © Osprey Publishing)

WHO IS SPARTACUS?

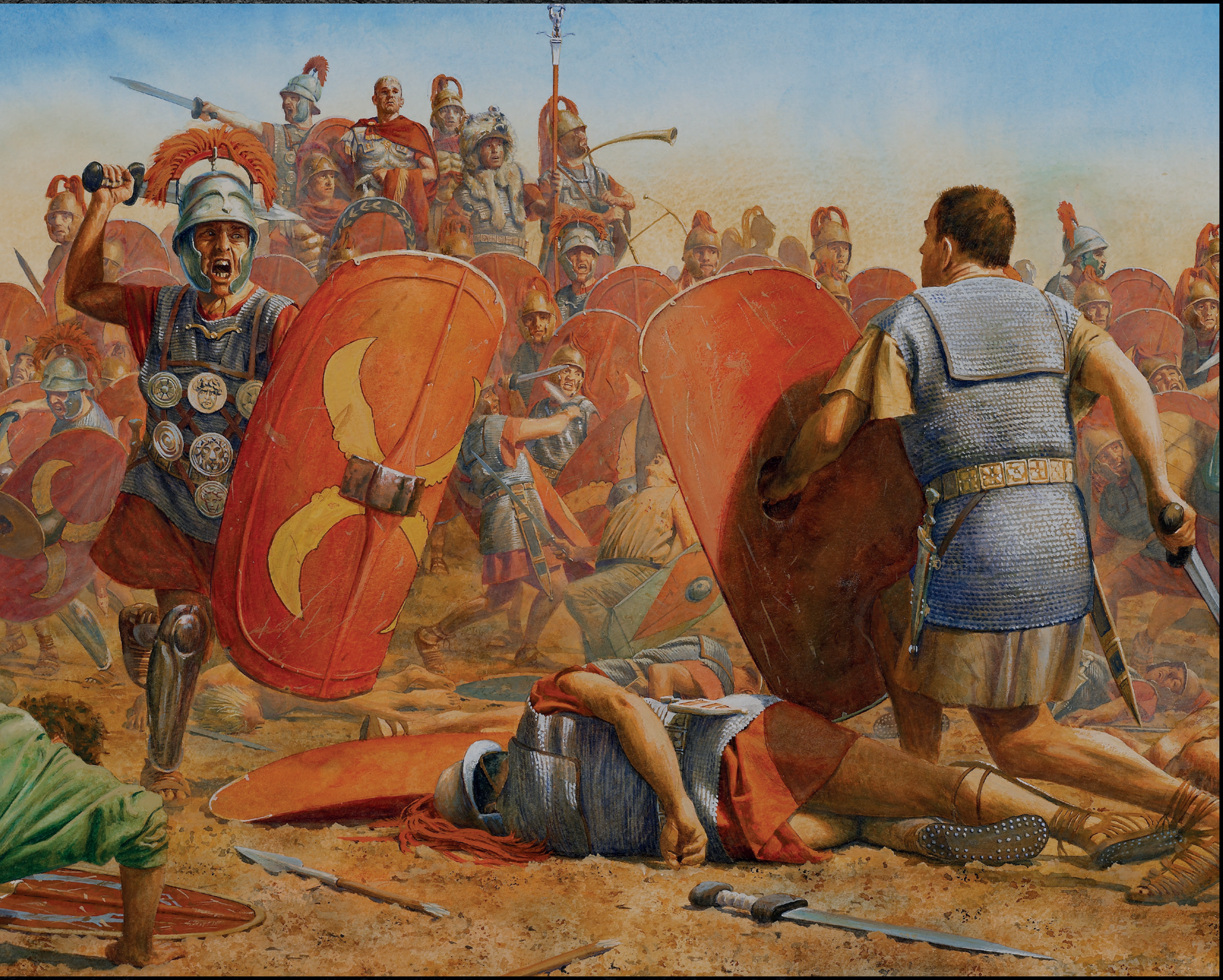
Although inextricably linked in popular imagination to Kirk Douglas in the Stanley Kubrick film of 1960, the real Spartacus was born some two thousand years earlier, a native of Thrace. Spartacus had served in the Roman army as a mercenary, but he was later sold as a slave, and bought at auction by the owner of a gladiator school in Capua. In 73BC, Spartacus escaped the school with 77 other men, and fled to the hills around Mount Vesuvius. Over time, more escaped slaves, gladiators and convicts joined Spartacus' band, and before long there were 70,000 disaffected rebels.

Having first dismissed the small scale of Spartacus' army, the Senate soon realised that they were a force to be reckoned with, and sent an army of 3,000 Roman soldiers to suppress the uprising. Spartacus' army defeated the Roman force, as well as the next one sent to quash them of 6,000 men, much to the horror of Rome. Spartacus' plan seems to have been to lead his army northwards through Italy, cross the Alps and then disperse when they got to Gaul.

During this journey Spartacus gave final proof to Rome, if proof were needed, that his army was a serious threat, when it massacred a Roman army of two legions – a total of 10,000 men – at Mutina (modern-day Modena), under the governor of Cisalpine Gaul, Cassius Longinus. Although their advance seemed to have been proceeding well, Spartacus seems to have changed his mind and he and his rebel slave army marched south to seek plunder.

It was clear that a decisive move was needed to prevent this slave rebellion from getting any further out of hand, so Crassus was appointed to organise the defeat of Spartacus' army. Crassus was a wealthy man, and built up a large force, which pursued Spartacus' army down to the Italian peninsula, effectively trapping them there. When a Roman prisoner was crucified by the rebel slaves, the Senate recalled Pompey from Spain and Lucullus from northern Turkey, to combine their forces with that of Crassus. Spartacus' army was eventually defeated on its way to the port of Brundisium, and Spartacus died on the battlefield. Six thousand of the rebel slaves were crucified along 200km of the Appian Way between Capua and Rome on Crassus' orders. They hung there as a warning to other slaves that the might of Rome would eventually catch up with any rebellion, though Spartacus and his army had certainly given the Roman army a run for its money.

Spartacus (right), having just cut down a centurion in his rush to attack Crassus (in the background), engages a second centurion. (Steve Noon © Osprey Publishing)



authority on which to base his power. Fighting with distinction in Italy, Sicily and North Africa, Pompey was granted the title 'Magnus' ('The Great') by Sulla, though this may have been more than a little ironic. After Sulla's retirement, the Senate continued to employ the services of this private citizen and his personal army. Employing Pompey, rather than a legally appointed magistrate under their control, set an exceptionally bad precedent. Probably the Senate felt that, since Pompey and his legions existed, it was better to use him than risk his turning against them.

In 71BC Pompey returned victorious from Spain, and decided to stand for the consulship the following year. He was too young, and had held none of the normally required junior magistracies, but he kept his legions outside the city as a scarcely veiled threat. Marcus Licinius Crassus, who had just returned from suppressing Spartacus' slave rebellion, took the opportunity to retain his own army and in turn declared himself a candidate for the consulship.

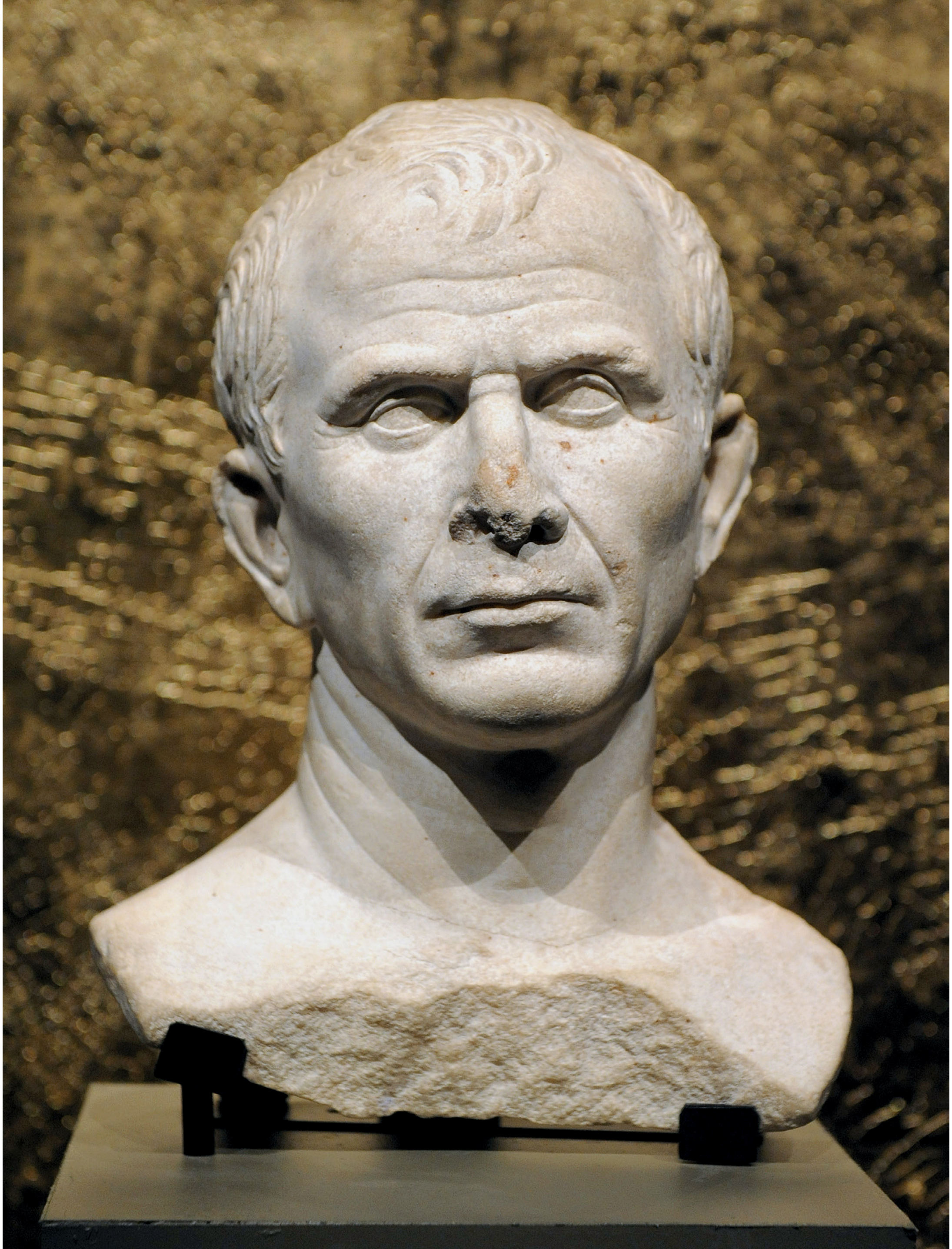
Crassus was exceptionally wealthy, his fortune based originally on property confiscated from Sulla's executed opponents. The Senate was forced to permit their candidature, and the Roman people, who were on the whole well disposed to both men after their successes, duly elected Pompey and Crassus as consuls for 70BC. Thus Pompey at the age of 36 entered the Senate directly as a consul, an utterly unprecedented action. His military record was already spectacular, but, given his age, he clearly expected to be given further important tasks.

Pompey's first major achievement was to suppress the pirates plaguing the Mediterranean. He orchestrated the command for this campaign in 67BC, as he knew it would bring early glory. A combination of careful organisation, massive resources, and a willingness to accept the surrender of pirate communities and resettle them elsewhere allowed Pompey to achieve victory in under two months. In 66BC, again by popular vote, Pompey was sent to Asia to continue the fighting against Mithridates of Pontus. The war was virtually over before Pompey arrived, so it took little time for him to complete the defeat of Mithridates, who committed suicide when his own son turned against him. Pompey then proceeded to campaign throughout the near east. After a three-month siege, Pompey took Jerusalem. He and his officers went into the Holy of Holies in the Great Temple, although they declined to take any of its treasures.

This was a great propaganda success, the Roman aristocracy always striving to be the first to do any spectacular deed. Pompey disbanded his army, and returned to Rome to celebrate an especially lavish triumph. Now he had two main political objectives: the first was to gain formal approval for all of his reforms in the eastern provinces; the second was to secure grants of land for the soldiers who had served him so well. However, despite his military greatness, Pompey was no politician, and opposition from Crassus amongst others meant the argument over his requests dragged on for nearly two years and was finally resolved in a manner that astounded most senators.

THE FIRST TRIUMVIRATE

In 60BC Julius Caesar returned from Further Spain, where he had campaigned with success against local tribes. Six years younger than Pompey, Caesar had had a fairly conventional career up to this point, although his lavish spending on games and public feasting, combined with his rakish lifestyle, had won him numerous political enemies. Having won the right to celebrate a triumph, Caesar hoped this honour would permit him to win the consulship for 59BC. Around this time



Caesar made approaches to both Crassus and Pompey and managed to reconcile them. Together the three men formed a secret political alliance, which is known by historians as the First Triumvirate. To cement the alliance, Pompey married Caesar's daughter, Julia, a union which, for all its political inspiration, proved to be a very happy one. In return for support for his candidature, Caesar undertook to gain land for Pompey's veterans and to secure the ratification of his Eastern Settlement. Caesar won the election, and was granted special command of three provinces, Illyricum, Cisalpine Gaul and Transalpine Gaul (modern-day Provence in southern France) for five years. Caesar departed for his provinces in 58BC, never to return to Italy until the beginning of the Civil War. Very much the junior partner of the triumvirate, Caesar needed military glory to rival Crassus and, especially, Pompey. At first he appears to have contemplated a Balkan war against the Dacian King Burebista, but the news of the migration of a Gallic tribe towards Transalpine Gaul shifted his focus away from Illyricum.

Over the next years Caesar campaigned throughout Gaul, twice bridged the Rhine and marched into Germany, and led two expeditions across the sea to Britain. That island remained unconquered, but the euphoria over Caesar's expeditions could be compared to the excitement that greeted the moon landing in 1969. Caesar won massive glory in his Gallic campaigns, and produced his *Commentaries*, probably published in annual instalments, to celebrate his achievements. As well as gaining glory, Caesar became one of the wealthiest men in the world from plunder and the sale of slaves, hundreds of thousands of whom were captured during the conflict.

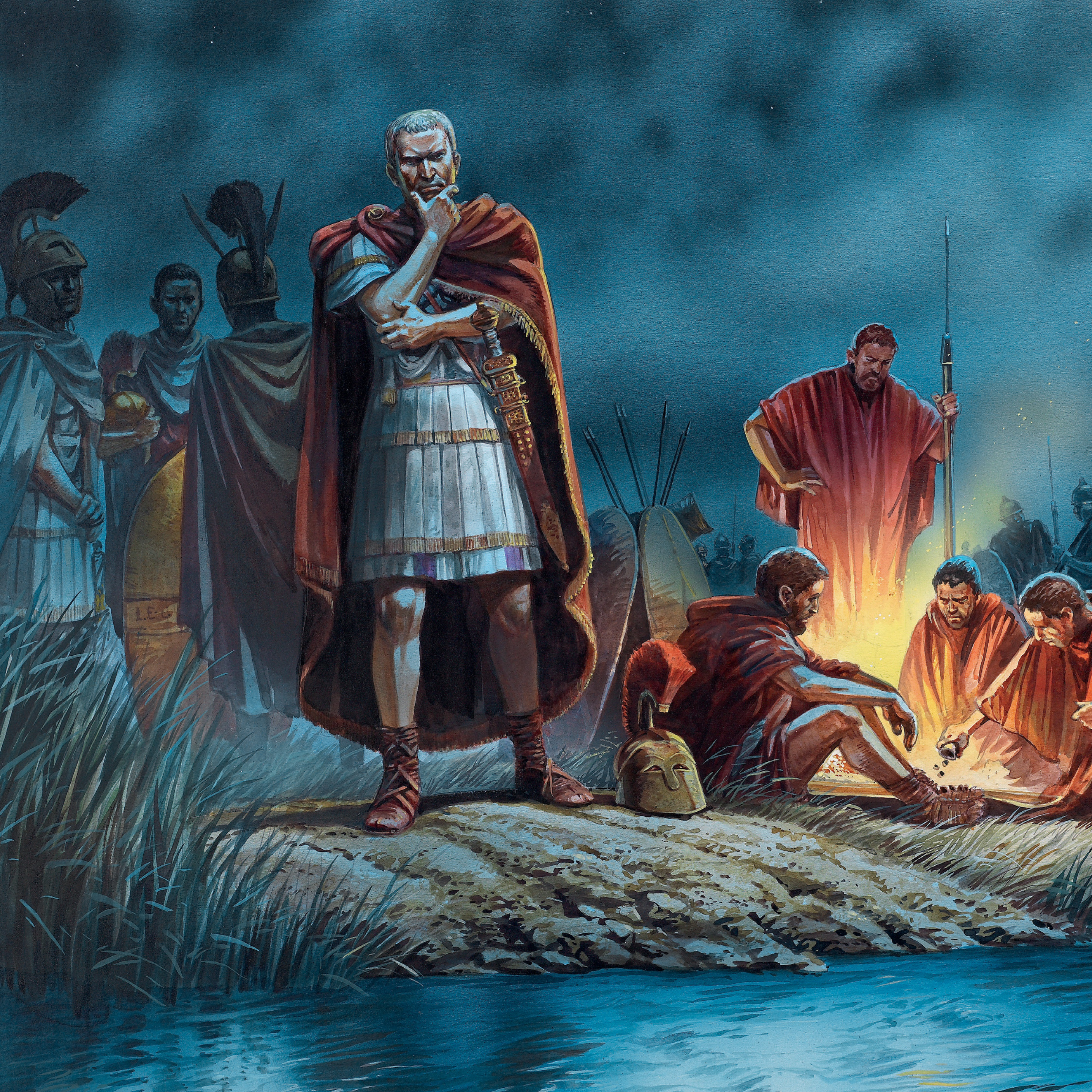
LEFT Bust of Julius Caesar in the Musée de l'Arles antique. (GERARD JULIEN/AFP/Getty Images)

In 55BC, after some rivalry, Crassus, Caesar and Pompey were once again elected to the consulship, and granted provinces: Caesar's command of his existing provinces was extended for another five years; Pompey was given both Spanish provinces (but in an unprecedented move was allowed to remain in Rome and command through subordinates); Crassus was given Syria, from which he planned to lead an invasion of Parthia, for it seems that he felt the need to rival the conquests of his colleagues. Aged almost 60, he was considered rather old for active command by Roman standards, and there were doubts about the legitimacy of a war with Parthia, but the triumvirs were too strong for any opposition to stand much chance. In 54BC Crassus left to join the army in Syria, and the following year he was defeated at the battle of Carrhae. Crassus was killed when his army was forced to retreat. Rome was still torn apart by political rivalry, and in 52BC, the Senate appointed Pompey sole consul and charged him with restoring order, for the first time permitting troops to guard Rome itself.

PRELUDE TO WAR

Julia having died two years before, in 52BC Pompey married the daughter of Publius Metellus Scipio, a known opponent of Caesar. Pressure on Caesar mounted, as incoming consuls lobbied to have him replaced in his province, since the war in Gaul appeared to be over. Pompey opposed these moves, but not particularly strongly – his attitude appeared increasingly ambivalent and the extension of his Spanish command gave him military might to match against Caesar. The latter was being forced into a corner. He had either to give up his command and trust Pompey to protect him from the inevitable wrath of his rivals, or to fight. Caesar's large, veteran army lay on Italy's own border, and many

Romans already feared that this force would be turned against the state in a bid for dictatorship. Eventually, Pompey's supporters persuaded him to recall veterans from his old army, and take command of two legions, I and XV. In the meantime, Caesar wrote to the Senate, reminding them of his military achievements on Rome's behalf, and offering to lay down his command, provided that Pompey did the same thing. If he did not, then Caesar felt that he was obliged to retain his legions as protection against the faction opposed to him. The letter also contained the scarcely veiled threat that he was also willing to free Rome from the tyranny of Pompey's faction. His offer was rejected, and on 7 January 49BC the Senate met and passed its ultimate decree, the *senatus consultum ultimum*, which called on the magistrates to use any means to defend the state. Disguised as slaves, Caesar's supporters hid in carts and fled north to join Caesar. In the days to come, Pompey and the Senate began to prepare the war effort against Caesar. The news reached Caesar at Ravenna on 10 January. He spent the day watching gladiators training and held a previously arranged dinner in the evening, but secretly issued orders for several parties of soldiers to travel in civilian clothes carrying concealed weapons to Ariminum (modern-day Rimini), the nearest town in Italy. With him he had only a single legion and apparently some 300 cavalrymen – they travelled by night, and reached the river Rubicon, which marked the boundary of Caesar's province. Commanders were barred by law from leading troops outside their province without the Senate's express permission, so crossing the river would turn Caesar into a rebel. After deliberation, Caesar crossed the Rubicon, uttering the famous line '*alea iacta est*' – 'the die is cast'.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ROMAN MILITARY REFORM

THE RISE OF THE PROFESSIONAL ARMY

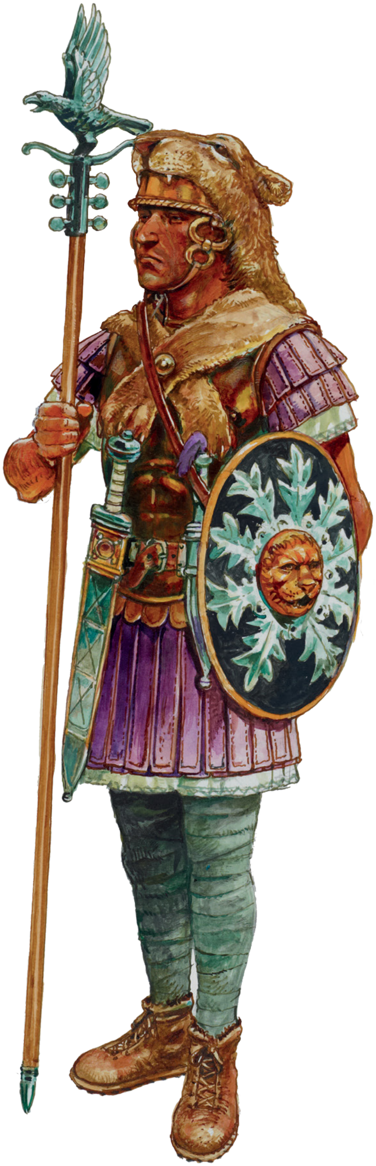
The conversion of the Roman army into a professional force during this period fundamentally altered its relationship with the rest of society. In a real sense the army represented a cross-section of Roman society under arms. For these men service in the army was not a career but a duty to the Republic. As men of property – most were farmers – they easily returned to civilian life after each period of service. However, as the Empire expanded, wars tended to last longer and be fought further away, while there was a growing need for permanent garrisons to protect conquered territory. A decade of service in a garrison in one of the Spanish provinces could well mean ruination for the owner of a small farm. Service became increasingly unpopular and the eventual solution was to turn to men who were willing to make the army their profession. A soldier's pay was low, the conditions of his service extremely harsh, and a military career only tended to be attractive to the poorest citizens, who in the past had not been obliged to serve. Such men proved excellent soldiers, but when the war ended and their legion was disbanded they had nothing to return to in civilian life. The Senate refused to acknowledge this situation, maintaining that military service was a duty requiring no formal reward, and made no

LEFT For Caesar's men, after crossing the Rubicon, they had to emerge victorious. Otherwise, they would be condemned as enemies of the state and treated accordingly. Here Caesar is on the north bank of the river, on the night of 10–11 January. He stands alone pondering the future. A little way apart are his officers, equally pensive. In the background a group of Caesar's soldiers idly play dice by torchlight. (Peter Dennis © Osprey Publishing) provision for discharged soldiers. Individual commanders began to demand land for their veteran soldiers, wanting to settle them in colonies on conquered territory. Soldiers started to become more loyal to generals who offered such rewards than to the Republic that neglected them. This transferral of direct and unquestioning military loyalty from the Senate as a whole to the generals as individuals was to prove fatal to the Republic.

THE MARIAN REFORMS OF THE ARMY

Marius was perhaps the first military leader who held greater command over his legions than did the Senate. By the time Marius was first made consul in 107BC he had already made his mark on the battlefield. A natural commander, Marius had won important battles against the armies of the Numidian King Jugurtha in the Jugurthine Wars of 110–105BC, effectively turning the fortunes of Rome around in the war, and eventually masterminding a triumphant Roman victory. His own success having been achieved on the battlefield, Marius easily commanded the respect of his men, but it was the changes brought about in the army during his command that cemented Marius' popularity. The military reforms carried out by Marius constitute a watershed in the development of the Roman military. Aware that a superpower, as Rome now was, required a huge army to service and protect it, Marius abolished the laws that had prevented a large part of the Roman population from taking positions in the army. Under Marius' reforms, ownership of property was no longer a requirement for soldiers. By boosting army numbers with this landless proletarian class Marius also ensured he had a bedrock of men who would be less opposed to, and even keen to carry out, long periods of continuous service, having no farms at home to worry about. These men became full-time professional soldiers, with no need to supplement their wages with a private income, meaning they could devote all of their time to training and campaigning.

A serious defeat with heavy loss of Roman life at the hands of the allied Germanic tribes of Cimbri and Teutones in 105BC was the spur for further reforms by Marius. The Assembly once more looked to Marius to prevent such severe losses being repeated – over 80,000 soldiers were apparently killed by the fierce Germanic tribes – and Marius did not disappoint them. He abolished the age distinctions, grouping the soldiers together into units called cohorts. All soldiers were armed with the same weapons, paid for by the government, offering a previously unseen

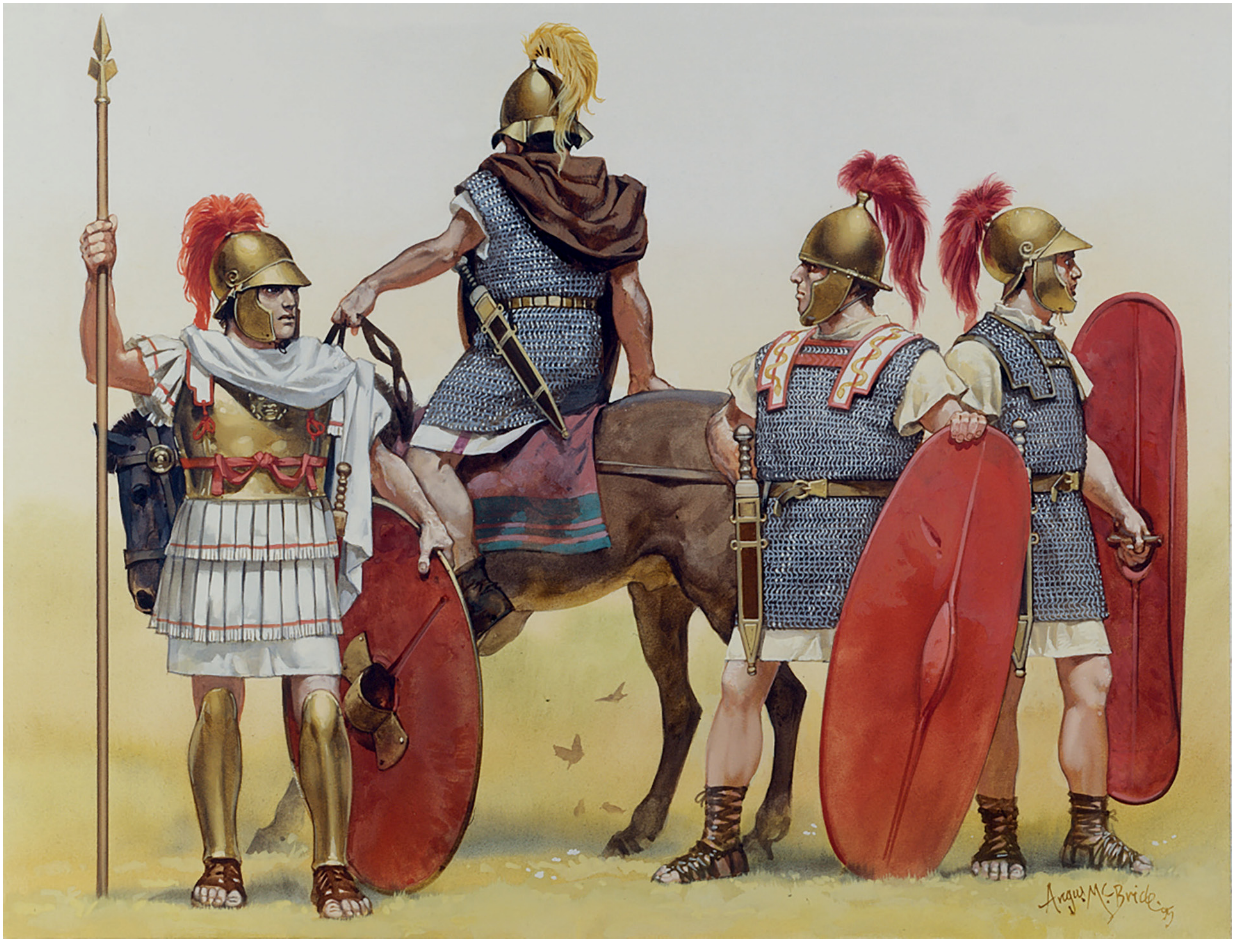


RIGHT Before the reforms of Marius, Pliny says that the legions of the Republican army had five animal standards: eagle, wolf, minotaur, horse and boar. Each standard belonged to a different type of soldier, from the *hastati* to the *triarii*. By choosing the eagle standard as a single symbol to unite the whole army, Marius was showing that they were now one body of men, equal in the eyes of their commander. This image depicts the famous eagle-bearer of Julius Caesar's Legio X. (Peter Dennis © Osprey Publishing) uniformity (and therefore perhaps predictability) to the way they fought as an army. The weapons they carried were the *pilum*, which Marius improved to make break at the neck on impact, and the *gladius*. In addition to these weapons, the soldiers carried all their supplies and equipment on their backs, leading to their nickname of 'Marius' mules'. The cohorts still fought in a flexible manipular style, but the centuries could be rearranged in different groupings, and the cohorts into different lines, affording greater flexibility to the army from battle to battle.

Marius made the legions more permanent, and gave them a symbol under which to unite – the eagle standard. Marius also made the army a more attractive career prospect by promising fitting reward for service. No longer would battle-weary veterans return to a retirement of financial ruin. Veterans were instead promised land for service, meaning that the future was one less thing that they had to worry about.

Marius' reforms were crucial to the army being a force fit for purpose at this time. However, they ultimately spelled disaster for the Republic, granting, as they did, power to individuals through the backing of an army, rather than the Senate. In this way, individuals could rise to power by force alone, bypassing and eventually attacking the Senate itself. Armies turned to their commanders for their orders, and not the government, and effectively became personal weapons. It would not be long before these armies were used against each other in civil war.

RIGHT From left to right figures are: a tribune, an *eques* and two infantrymen. (Angus McBride © Osprey Publishing)


Angus McBride 95

A SNAPSHOT OF THE ROMAN ARMY AT THE TIME OF THE GALLIC WARS

The Roman army that campaigned in Gaul in the first century BC was to all intents and purposes a professional one, with many soldiers in the legion regarding their military service as a career. The soldiers were equipped, trained and paid by the state, often serving for many years at a stretch. Gallic warfare, however, was based on the values of a warrior society. The Roman conquest of Gaul was therefore a clash between two cultures employing very different methods of waging war.

RECRUITMENT AND SERVICE

Recruitment to the legions was based on a mixture of conscription and volunteering, the only qualification for service being citizenship, at least in theory. Recruits were supposed to be at least 17 years old, although the majority were in their early 20s when they joined up. Roman ideology preferred recruits from rural backgrounds, rather than from towns and cities with their softening and corrupting influences. The legionaries signed up for military service of no fixed length, although they could expect to be discharged with a grant of land on which to settle after five years or so continuous service. Military pay was not especially good, but there were plenty of opportunities for enrichment, particularly on a lucrative campaign like Caesar's conquest of Gaul, with the likelihood of generous amounts of booty.

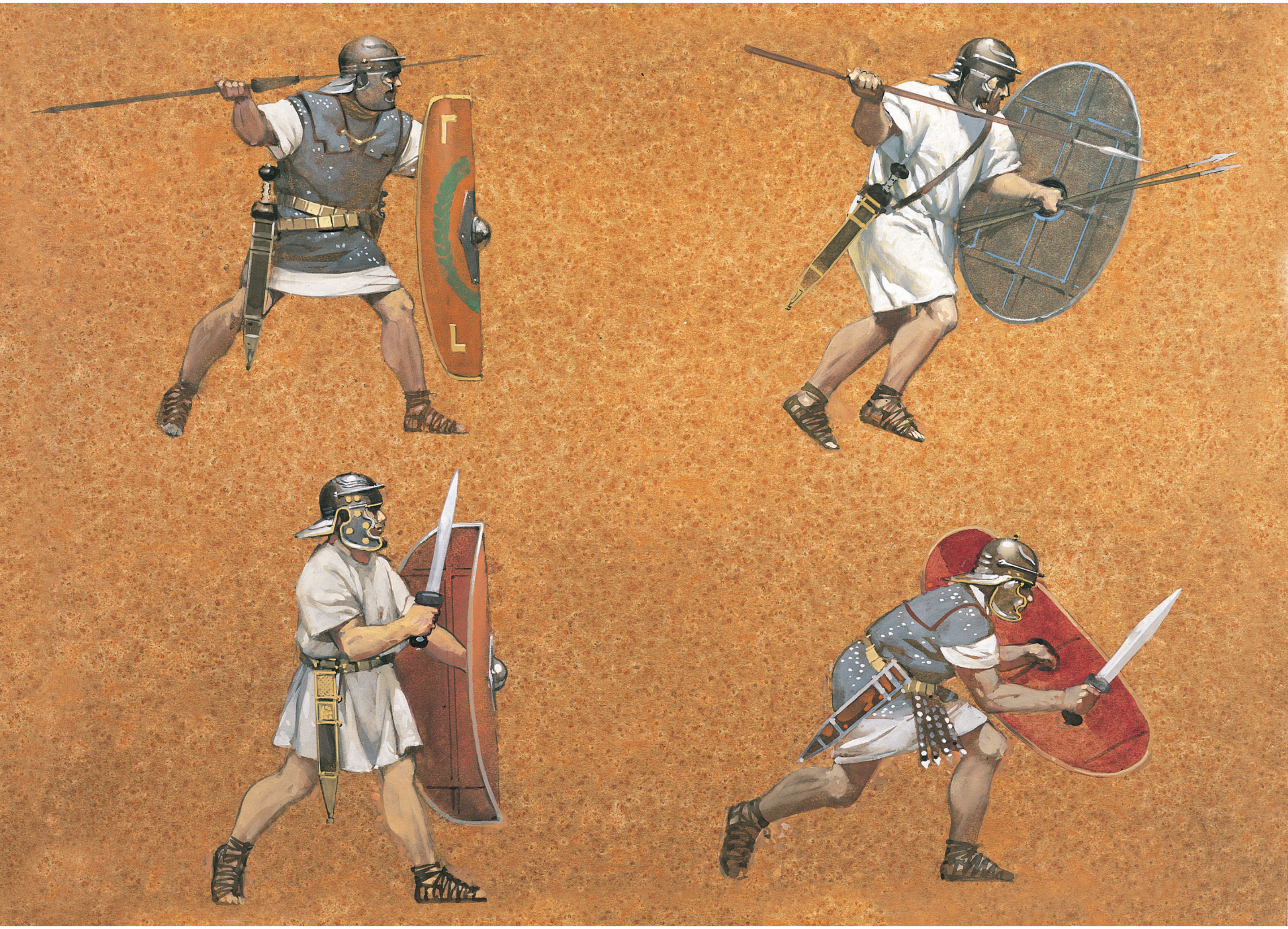
While the legions were armed and equipped uniformly, and were principally heavy infantry, the variation in type of forces a successful army needed was provided by 'auxiliary' units raised from other provinces of the Roman Empire, or from neighbouring states and tribes friendly to Rome. Caesar was so successful in his early campaigns in Gaul and his military prestige so great that he was able to attract auxiliary units from not only the Gallic tribes, but also the Germans, who provided him with another source of cavalry that was particularly valuable when the loyalty of his most reliable Gaulish allies, the Aedui, wavered in 52BC.

Auxiliaries used their own fighting techniques; they were not trained in the Roman style of fighting, and were commanded by their own officers, usually members of the ruling elite of the tribe or state from which they were recruited.

ORGANISATION AND LOGISTICS

The Roman army in Gaul included slingers from the Balearics and archers from Crete and Numidia, who provided lightly armed mobile troops to increase the firepower of the army, particularly at a distance or in a siege. Additional infantry was provided by Gallic tribes in the same way as cavalry, and would have consisted of groups of warriors from tribes who were allied to Rome. The wealthiest of these warriors were probably armed and equipped in a way very similar to the Roman legionaries, but the Gauls placed greater emphasis on individual prowess and prominent displays of courage in battle, rather than the discipline and training of the legions.

Auxiliaries provided the Roman army's main cavalry force. The cavalry Caesar employed in Gaul, consisting mainly of Gallic or Germanic elites, was not always reliable or effective, and sometimes they lacked discipline, particularly early on in the campaigns. By the end of the campaigns the cavalry was a powerful force that contributed to Caesar's victory in the Civil War. The German cavalry sometimes worked in concert with light infantry, which allowed the holding of terrain in addition to the useful mobility of cavalry. Logistical support was generally well organised, with a supply system reliant on shuttling provisions from a supply base



to the campaigning army. The army made use of Gaul's navigable rivers to move supplies around, but the poor road system and the speed of Caesar's movements led to difficulties. Although Caesar could call on his Gallic allies and later the subjected tribes for supplies, his movements and the direction of the campaign were often heavily influenced by logistical demands. An understanding of this lay behind the Gallic scorched-earth policy in Vercingetorix's revolt of 52BC. When the legions were in winter quarters, Caesar ensured they were garrisoned in the territories of recently conquered tribes to serve the dual purpose of ensuring a strong military presence in newly reduced territory, and punishing those who resisted Rome by forcing them to feed the occupying army, a penalty that could have affected a tribe's ability to support its own population.

FIGHTING STYLE

The Roman legionary's equipment did not make him reliant on his neighbour's shield for protection in combat as in a Greek phalanx operation, as he fought as an individual, but he was dependent on the strength of his unit. If his comrades in his century, cohort or legion gave way, he would eventually become exposed to attack on the flank or rear. The might of the Roman army lay in the strength of its formations, and that was based on unit morale, discipline and training. Roman soldiers were not

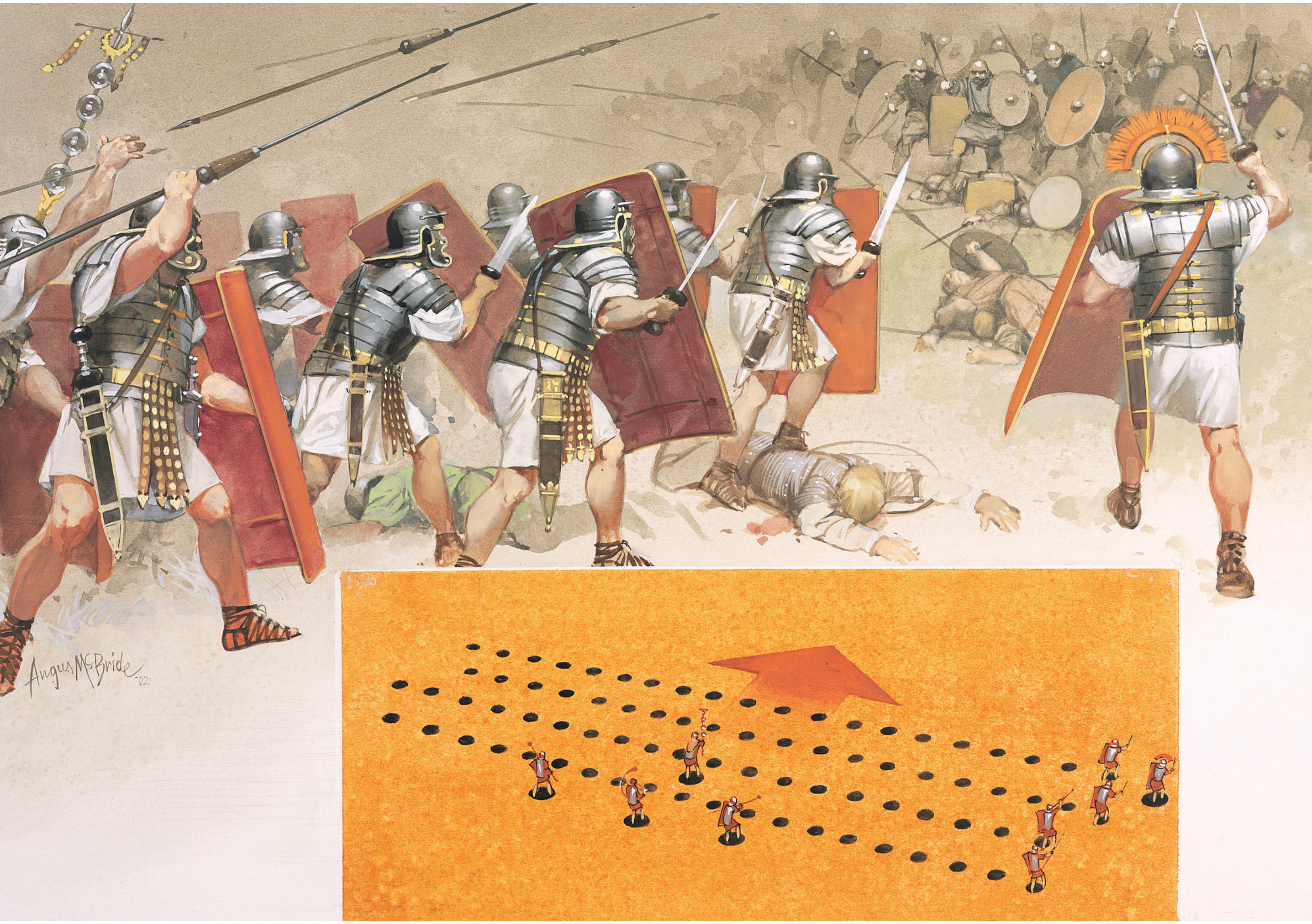
LEFT These figures illustrate legionary fighting techniques. The top left-hand figure is a typical heavy-armed legionary throwing his heavy *pilum* prior to charging with his sword. The top right figure shows a dedicated light-armed legionary. The bottom left-hand figure is a regular legionary advancing without armour. The bottom right-hand figure is a legionary in a crouch stance. (Angus McBride © Osprey Publishing) automatons in a 'military machine'; they were trained to think and use their own initiative as well as follow orders. The training and discipline instilled in the soldiers meant that Roman units could move over battlefields in formation and even retreat while maintaining a defensive formation, an invaluable technique in warfare for minimising casualties.

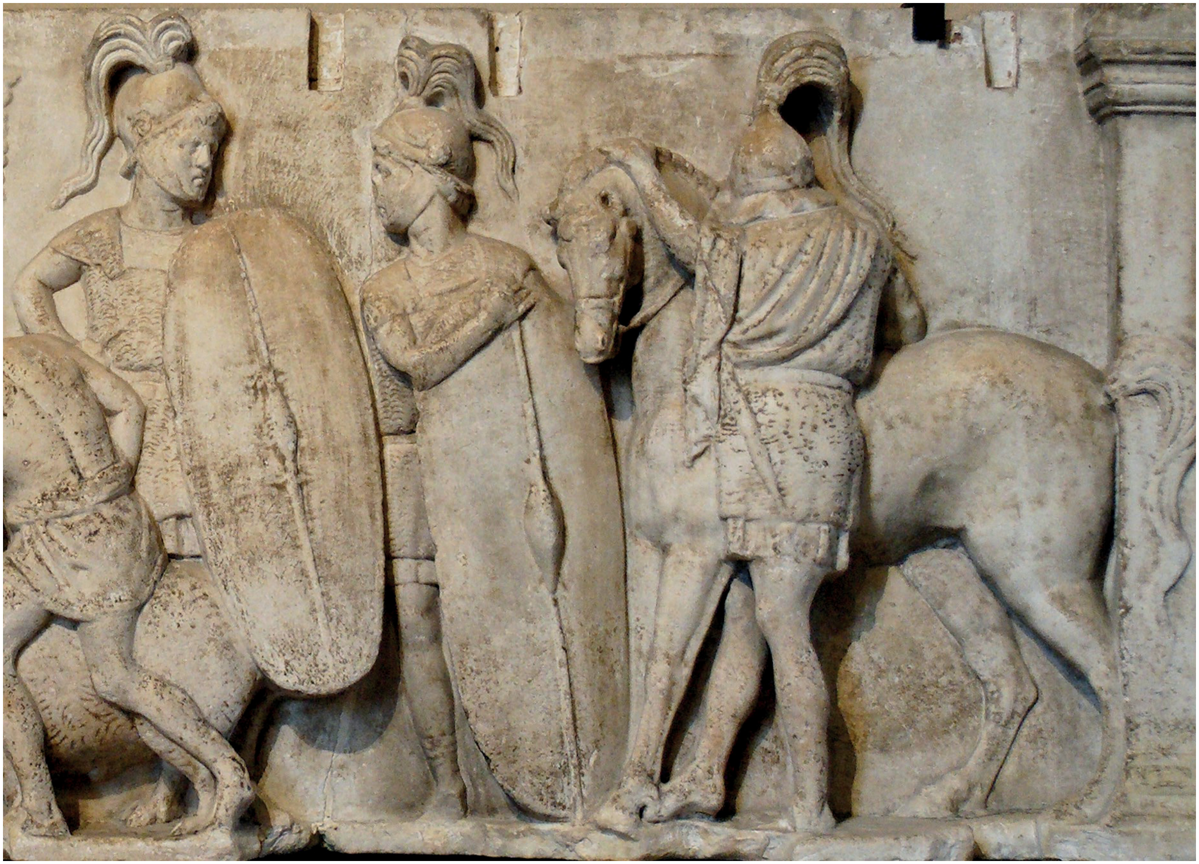
In combat with opponents with slashing swords, the Roman legionaries threw their *pila* and then moved in very close for hand-to-hand combat. The large *scutum* protected most of the legionary's front and left side, his short *gladius* was ideal for stabbing in close-quarter fighting, and he could even punch at the enemy with the metal boss of his shield. If the legionaries moved in close enough, they could literally cramp the style of their opponents, while still giving themselves the small amount of room they needed to operate effectively.

WEAPONS, EQUIPMENT AND ARMOUR

Legions were uniformed at state expense, and were well equipped for their military roles. Each legionary, with his mail coat and bronze or iron helmet, was armed as well as the most wealthy and successful Celtic warriors, and this must have given them a huge psychological advantage when facing the Gauls. The large shield or

RIGHT Although these soldiers are from slightly later, in the first century AD, they are organised in a way typical of the late Republican army. Here we see a front century formed in four ranks of 20, with the centurion, identified by his helmet crest, positioned on the extreme right. The standard bearer is at the centre of the formation to prevent him from being killed during the first clash and stop the standard from falling into enemy hands. The inset reveals the regular 'chessboard' formation of the legionaries. Having advanced within range of the enemy the front ranks would have thrown their lead-weighted *pila* and are charging at the run with drawn swords. (Angus McBride © Osprey Publishing)





scutum provided additional protection. The legionary's principal weapons were the *pilum* and short sword, the *gladius*. The short *gladius* was a brutally efficient tool for killing: a short stab at the torso or especially the belly of his opponent, who may well have been fighting without armour, and he would have been killed or badly injured with damage to internal organs and serious bleeding. Though Roman soldiers were trained to stab with their swords, that did not stop them from slashing with them, and the fine quality and perfect weighting of the *gladius* meant that they could easily hack off limbs.

The Celtic-style saddle allowed Caesar's cavalry to be as effective as later, stirruped cavalry, despite the absence of stirrups. Cavalry troops might vary considerably in their equipment, since they equipped themselves, but a wealthy cavalryman might have a mail shirt and helmet, an oval or hexagonal shield which was more manoeuvrable on horseback than a rectangular one, a spear and a long sword, which was ideal for running down those fleeing from battle, one of the principal roles of the cavalry.

THE CIVIL WARS OF ROME

The success in 49BC of Julius Caesar's invasion of Italy effectively tolled the death knell of the Republican political system, for after his victory he established himself as sole ruler of the Roman world. Caesar was murdered because his power was too blatant, and his assassination returned Rome to another period of civil war, which

LEFT A detail from the Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus, from the first century BC. The armour and equipment used by the infantrymen and cavalrymen can be clearly seen. (Jastrow/Public Domain/Wikimedia) ended only when Caesar's nephew and adopted son Octavian defeated his last rival in 31BC. It was left to Octavian, later given the name Augustus, to create the regime known as the Principate, a monarchy in all but name, returning stability to Rome and its Empire at the cost of a loss of political freedom.

CAESAR SEIZES CONTROL

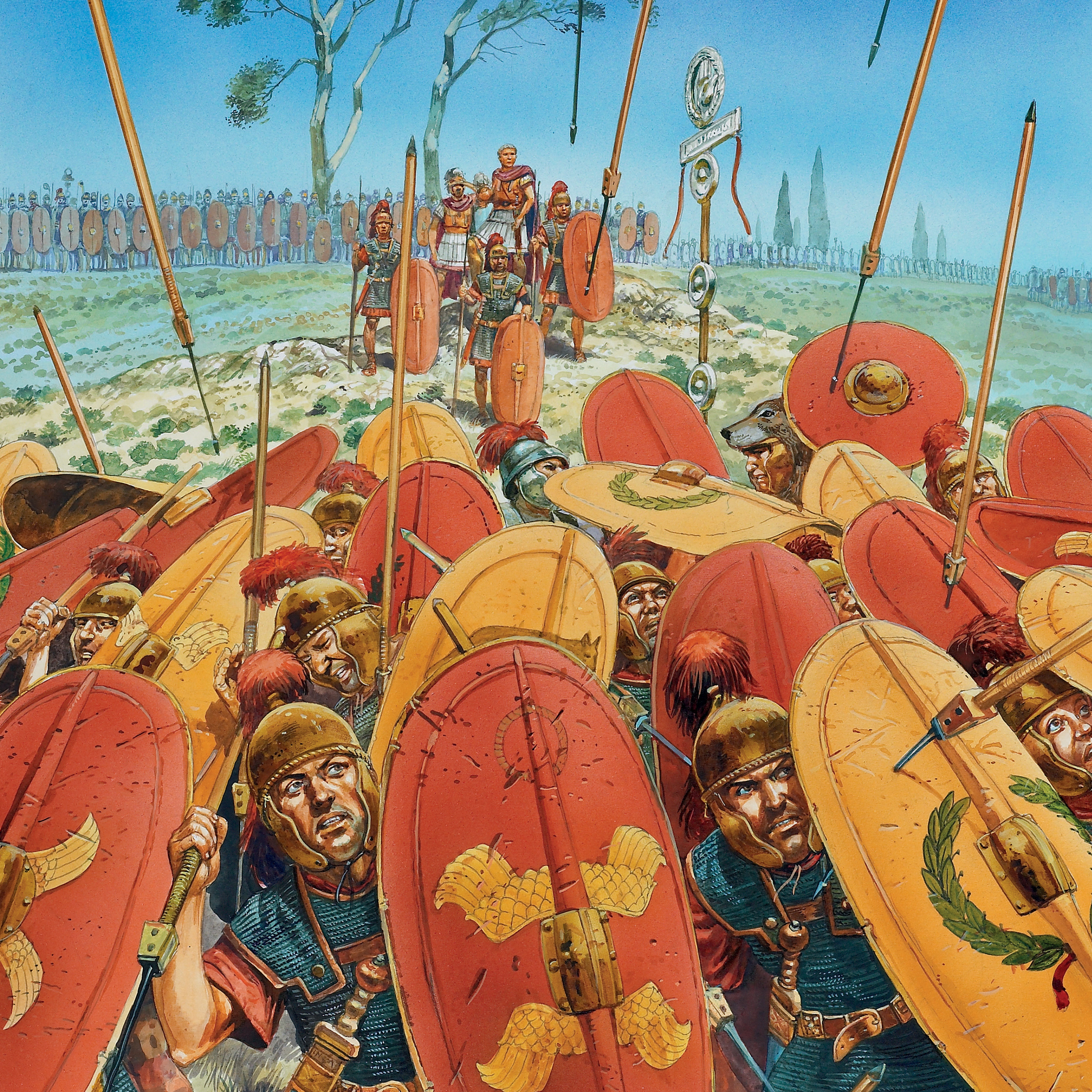
Once Caesar made the decision to cross the Rubicon into Roman territory in 49BC, much of Rome was filled with dread about the bloodshed that they believed would follow. The precedent of every civil war fought in the last 40 years gave them good reason to fear. In Gaul, Caesar and his legions had fought very aggressively and often with extreme brutality, some sources claiming that over a million people had been killed in less than a decade. Perhaps, as some modern commentators claim, many expected the legions to behave in no less harsh a manner now that they had burst into Italy, and the famous orator and politician Cicero on one occasion even wondered whether Caesar would not prove more like Hannibal than a Roman general.

Caesar's army moved quickly, and he seized towns largely unopposed. The advance of his army was not accompanied by massacre or atrocity, however, and his soldiers were under strict orders not to loot. Caesar was trying to show that he was still willing to compromise. Messages went back and forth as he suggested various compromises. Pompey and his allies replied by saying that they could not negotiate while Caesar commanded troops on Italian soil, and that he must return to Cisalpine Gaul before anything could be discussed. Pompey did offer to leave for Spain once Caesar had laid down his command, but Caesar refused the offer, perhaps not trusting the Senate, or maybe feeling that he had gone too far to withdraw at this stage. Even so, both sides continued to claim publicly that they still hoped for a negotiated settlement, and were only thwarted by the enemy's intransigence.

The suddenness of Caesar's advance surprised and unnerved his opponents, just as he had intended. Pompey left Rome in the second half of January, declaring that it could not be defended. He was followed by most of the magistrates, including the consuls, who left in such haste that it suggested panic. Many Romans were still uncertain about just how firmly committed each side was to fighting, and this open admission of military weakness made many wonder whether Pompey could really be relied on to defend the Republic.

The early clashes between Caesar and Pompey's armies went badly for Pompey, and were opportunities for Caesar to gain more troops, and garner support in Italy for his now-notorious clemency (*clementia*), a policy to which he would adhere throughout the conflict in marked contrast to his opponents, who employed the more brutal methods normal in past civil wars. In less than two months Caesar had seized control in Italy. Pompey had escaped, with the best of his soldiers and many leading senators. Caesar sent his lieutenant, Gaius Scribonius Curio, with two legions to secure Sardinia and then Africa. Caesar himself decided to set out for Spain overland and defeat Pompey's legions there. In a matter of months, and through a mixture of boldness and skilful manoeuvre, Caesar had overrun Spain at minimal loss to himself.

In Africa, Curio encountered the governor, Publius Attius Varus, who had declared against Caesar. He was supported by the Numidian King Juba, who commanded a large, if sometimes unreliable, army. Curio had little military experience – none at all of high command – and was considered brilliant but unreliable by most of his contemporaries. Acting on false intelligence, Curio launched an attack on what he believed was a small detachment of Juba's army. In fact, the bulk of the king's forces was there, and the



Romans were ambushed and virtually annihilated. Curio was surrounded with the remnant of his troops on a hilltop and died fighting. Only a small fraction of the army escaped to Italy. This was not the only bad news reaching Caesar in late 49BC, for Mark Antony, a tribune who supported Caesar, had suffered a lesser defeat in Illyricum.

Caesar spent a short time in Rome, having been appointed dictator before he arrived, and held the post for 11 days, using his powers to hold elections in which he was voted to the consulship. He was eager to move against Pompey, and near the end of the year went to join his army of some 12 legions along with 1,000 cavalry which had been assembled at Brundisium. Caesar exhorted his soldiers by saying that this next campaign would be the culmination of their labours. The crossing of the Adriatic was a great gamble, for Caesar had no significant naval force with which to oppose the vast Pompeian fleet, yet the enemy did not expect Caesar to move in winter when the weather was poor, and Caesar landed without opposition at Paeleste in Epirus. However, Bibulus, commander of the Pompeian fleet, intercepted some of Caesar's transport ships, isolating Caesar from the remainder of his army under Mark Antony, and leaving him severely outnumbered by the enemy.

Caesar was isolated, with few supplies, and his men had to make do with the little they had brought with them and whatever could be gathered from local communities. Finally, on 10 April, Mark Antony managed to bring the remaining legions across the Adriatic – Pompey reacted too slowly and failed to prevent the union of the two forces. Caesar's supply problems continued to hamper his progress, and his army

LEFT In this scene we see Pompey at the battle of Pharsalus, having just ordered his three battle lines to stand fast, witness his front-line men attempt to parry a shower of Caesarian *pila* with their *scuta*. Before long, their retreat will show every sign of degenerating into a rout. (Peter Dennis © Osprey Publishing) experienced some defeats in skirmishes against the enemy. Pompey now had several options. One was to use his fleet to cross to Italy, now largely unprotected, but this would still mean that Caesar had to be defeated at some future date, and might be seen as running from his opponent. His personal belief was that they ought to shadow Caesar's army, but avoid open confrontation, hoping to wear him down by depriving him of supplies. This was a well-known Roman strategy, often known by the nickname of 'kicking the enemy in the belly'. However, there was massive pressure from the senators with the army to bring matters to a swift conclusion by bringing the enemy to battle. In early August the two armies camped near each other on the plains of Pharsalus. Several days were spent in the manoeuvring and formal challenges to battle that so often preceded the battles of this period. The pressure on Pompey to fight grew stronger and stronger. Finally the two armies clashed again at the battle of Pharsalus, a defeat for Pompey despite his superior numbers. This was a deeply humiliating defeat, and saw Pompey leave for the coast directly afterwards.

DEFEAT OF POMPEY AND WAR WITH EGYPT

Caesar rested only a very short time after the victory before rushing in pursuit of Pompey; until he had been taken or killed there could be no end to the war. News arrived that Pompey had gone to Rhodes and then taken ship for Egypt, hoping to receive aid in rebuilding an army.

RIGHT Bust of Cleopatra in the Altes Museum, Berlin. Plutarch says: 'Her actual beauty was not in itself so remarkable; it was the impact of her spirit that was irresistible. The attraction of her person, joining with the charm of her conversation and the characteristic qualities of all she said or did, was something bewitching. It was a delight merely to hear the sound of her voice.' (Sailko/CC BY 3.0/Wikimedia)

Egypt was wracked by its own civil war at this time, for the old King Ptolemy XI Auletes (or 'flute-player') had left the throne jointly to his son Ptolemy XII – a boy of about 14 – and his eldest daughter Cleopatra.

The boy king was dominated by his advisers, Pothinus the eunuch and Achillas the commander of his army, a force that effectively included two Roman legions which had been in the province since 55BC and had largely 'gone native'. Pompey's ship arrived on the coast near Ptolemy's camp and he appealed to the young king for support. Since the king was unwilling to support a loser and eager to win favour with the victor, Pompey was lured ashore and murdered, the first blow being struck by a centurion who had served under him in his Asian campaigns.

Caesar landed at Alexandria on 2 October 48BC, and was met by a deputation from Ptolemy that presented him with Pompey's head and signet ring. Caesar is supposed to have wept, distraught at the loss of his former friend and missing the opportunity of pardoning him. This emotion may have been genuine, as indeed may his alleged desire to spare Pompey, but it is equally possible that he simply wished to distance himself from the cruelty of an act from which he derived political benefit. Nevertheless, he gave honourable burial to Pompey's remains, then marched in pomp to the palace. This display enraged the volatile Alexandrians and provoked some rioting. Caesar's soldiers responded with force and, since the late king had recommended his children to Rome, declared that both sides in the Egyptian Civil War should disarm and submit to his arbitration. Some time in the next few days Cleopatra visited Caesar. The most famous story is that she was wrapped up in a carpet or blanket and carried secretly into the palace by a faithful Greek attendant, before being unrolled in front of a mesmerised Caesar. Cleopatra was 21 – more than 30 years younger than Caesar – exceptionally attractive, highly educated, intelligent, and with a fascinating personality. This began one of the most famous romances in history.

It was not long before Ptolemy's advisers felt that their cause could not compete with his sister's for Caesar's favour. Leading their army to support the mob of Alexandria, they besieged the palace, blockading Caesar's men for six months. His soldiers were close to panic when the water supply was cut off, but new wells were dug inside the compound and the crisis averted. Reinforced by Legio XXXVII, composed of former Pompeians, Caesar became bolder and attempted to seize the whole of the Pharos Island, on which the great lighthouse, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, was built. After a near-disastrous naval engagement which caused confusion and panic among Caesar's troops, almost leading to his drowning, Caesar regained control and his army was reinforced by that of King Mithridates of Pergamum, who had marched overland from Asia Minor to Egypt. In the next engagement, Ptolemy fled, but drowned when the boat carrying him to safety capsized. Caesar returned to relieve Alexandria.

The war in Egypt was over, but for more than half a year Caesar had been out of contact with the rest of the world. The surviving Pompeians had had time to regroup, and the Civil War would drag on. Caesar remained in Egypt for two months, allegedly feasting with Cleopatra. At one stage the queen is supposed to have taken him on a luxurious cruise down the Nile. Militarily and politically, Caesar's inaction for this long period makes no sense. Perhaps he had never had a clear plan for what he should do once he had won the Civil War, or perhaps he was exhausted and could not resist a time of rest in fascinating company.

POMPEY VS CAESAR –

EFFECTIVENESS OF ARMIES AND GENERALS

By the end of the Gallic campaigns, Caesar commanded ten legions. The majority of these troops were seasoned veterans, utterly devoted to Caesar and confident in their own and their commander's ability. In support were bands of excellent Gallic and German cavalry. To match against this Pompey had seven legions garrisoning his Spanish provinces, although these had little actual combat experience. There were also two legions that had not yet left for the east and were still in Italy, but as both had recently served under Caesar their loyalty appeared questionable. However, Pompey boasted that he had only to stamp his foot in Italy for more legions to appear, and was also sure of the loyalty of the eastern provinces which he had reorganised just over a decade before. In the long term, Pompey could probably claim greater resources than Caesar, but it would take time to mobilise these into field armies.

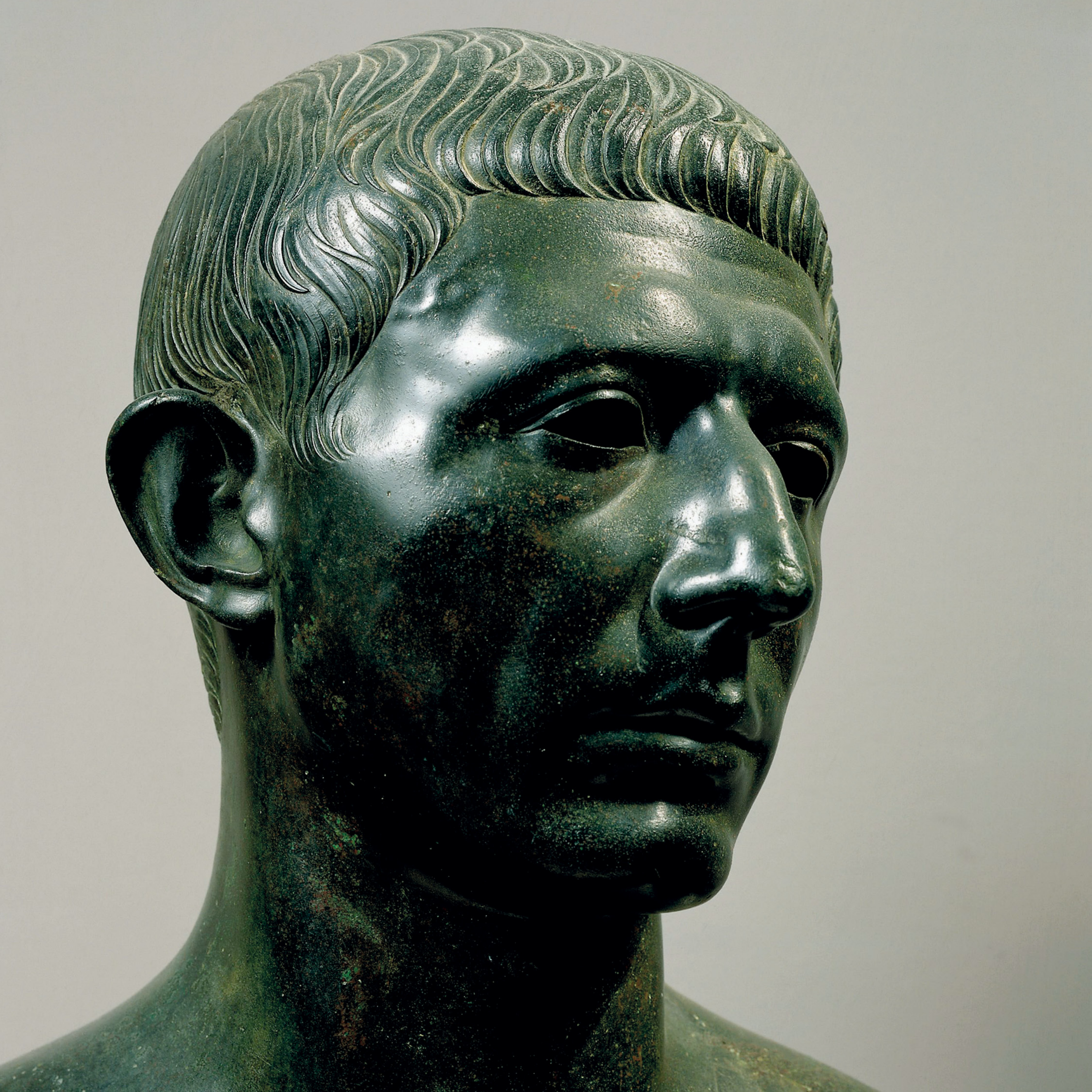
In 49BC, Pompey was almost 58, but remained an extremely fit and active man, and others marvelled at the energy he showed in joining the training exercises of his soldiers. His military record was extremely good, even if he had made something of a habit of arriving in the last stages of a conflict to claim the credit largely won by someone else. He was certainly a brilliant organiser, as his campaign against pirates, as well as, more recently, his supervision of Rome's corn supply, had shown. In his youth he had been a bold commander, on several occasions leading charges in person, but his aggression, in a properly Roman way, had always been based on sound preparation.

However, although he was six years older than Caesar, Pompey had spent the last decade in Rome, and had not served on campaign since 62BC. His performance during the Civil War would suggest that he was past his best as a general. He was not helped by the presence of so many distinguished senators in his camp. Unlike Caesar, whose followers were undistinguished and whose authority was unchallenged, Pompey was always under pressure to alter his plans. Most of the senators who flocked to his cause had more prestige than ability, and on more than a few occasions proved a positive hindrance.

Caesar failed to attract any distinguished supporters from the senior members of the Senate.

Now in his early 50s, he was still very much at the peak of his ability, and was fresh from a decade of successful fighting in Gaul. His strategy during the Civil War, as in Gaul, was based on rapid offensives, sometimes in the face of great odds. Though often criticised for recklessness by modern commentators, it is important to emphasise that such boldness was characteristically Roman, and should not conceal that much preparation underlay these enterprises. Although subject to occasional epileptic fits, he was in other respects an extremely healthy and active man, capable of massive effort and rapid long-distance travel. Caesar promoted and lavishly rewarded any soldiers who distinguished themselves, but even more than this it was his remarkable charisma that ensured that his soldiers were devoted to him. Throughout the war, desertions from the Pompeian forces were common, but all of our sources claim that there were no defections in the other direction. Fighting a war to protect his honour and status, Caesar's objective was clear and obvious, giving the Caesarian war effort a unity of purpose not displayed by the other side. Yet it also meant that it was much easier for him to lose. If Caesar was killed, or his army defeated so heavily that he was discredited, then the war would effectively have been over. Only the Pompeians could suffer another defeat and still prolong the struggle.

It is hard now to say whether Pompey or Caesar was the better general. The vast bulk of our evidence comes, either directly or indirectly, from Caesar's own version of events. His *Commentaries* obviously present his own actions in a favourable light, while dismissing those of the enemy. However, they also provide evidence that allows some of the wisdom of Caesar's decisions to be questioned. Yet, for the Romans the answer was obvious, for the most important attribute of a general was that he won his wars. Caesar defeated Pompey, and in the end there was no more to be said.



VENI, VIDI, VICI – THE ZELA CAMPAIGN

It was not until late May or early June 47BC that Caesar finally stirred himself to move. There was bad news from Syria, and he sailed there with Legio VI, leaving the rest of his army to garrison Egypt. Caesar marched against Pharnaces, son of King Mithridates, and cause of his father's suicide. Seeing the disorder caused within the Empire by the Civil War, Pharnaces decided to invade the heartland of Pontus, a territory 'lost' to Rome. Caesar met Pharnaces at Zela, and won a hard-fought battle, which decided the war within days of the beginning of the campaign. Caesar is said to have commented on how lucky Pompey had been to make his reputation as a commander fighting such opponents. Later, when he celebrated his triumph over Pontus, the procession included placards bearing just three Latin words: '*Veni, vidi, vici'* – 'I came, I saw, I conquered'.

Although the eastern Mediterranean was now settled, many problems had developed elsewhere during Caesar's absence. In Spain, the harsh regime of Caesar's supporter Quintus Cassius Longinus had provoked rebellion, while in Africa, Caesar's senatorial opponents Metellus Scipio, Titus Labienus, Marcus Cato (the Younger) and many other die-hard senators had raised an enormous army supported by King Juba. There were difficulties in Italy, too, made worse by the lack of communication

LEFT Bronze bust of Cato the Younger, AD60, from Volubilis, Morocco. According to Plutarch, 'It is said of Cato that even from his infancy, in his speech, his countenance, and all his childish pastimes, he discovered an inflexible temper, unmoved by any passion, and firm in everything ... to go through with what he undertook. He was rough and ungentle toward those that flattered him, and still more unyielding to those who threatened him. It was difficult to excite him to laughter, his countenance seldom relaxed even into a smile; he was not quickly or easily provoked to anger, but if once incensed, he was no less difficult to pacify.' (Photo by DEA / G. DAGLI ORTI/De Agostini/Getty Images) from Caesar while he was in Egypt. There was also another mutiny among Caesar's veterans, news made all the more bitter because the ringleaders came this time from Caesar's own favourite, the Legio X. The older soldiers wanted to be discharged and others complained that they had not received the rewards promised once their labours were at an end. These were their public grievances, but boredom may have played as big a part in provoking the outbreak, for throughout history armies have been more prone to mutiny when they are inactive. Caesar arrived back in Italy just as the mutineers were gearing themselves up to march on Rome. His behaviour amazed them when he rode into their camp and addressed them and asked what they wanted. Already stunned, the veterans were horrified when he addressed them as *quirites* – civilians rather than soldiers – instead of comrades. It was an incredible display of Caesar's charisma and self-assurance, for soon the legionaries and especially Legio X were begging him to decimate them and take them back into his service.

Caesar was impatient to embark on the African campaign, and spent the bare minimum of time in Rome before hurrying across to Sicily, then on to Africa. A difficult campaign against Scipio's army, reinforced by that of King Juba, saw Caesar's troops suffering at the hands of Numidian cavalry, but Caesar eventually triumphed at Thapsus, specially targeting the enemy elephants with his slingers and archers, panicking the animals, who fled, trampling their own troops. Cato committed suicide, as did Juba. Scipio fled by sea, but drowned when his ship sank. Africanus was captured and executed. However, Labienus and Pompey's two sons escaped to Spain to continue the struggle.

Caesar went back to Rome. In the past he had held the dictatorship for just long enough to hold consular elections, but now the Senate voted him into the office for ten years. He held four triumphs over the Gauls, Egyptians, Pharnaces and Juba

DECIMATION

Decimation was one of the most serious punishments that could be meted out in the Roman army. It involved the tenth man of each legion being condemned to death, with the execution being carried out by his peers, usually through a violent beating. Decimation was sometimes used as a punishment for legions that had deserted or fled a battlefield against orders. Polybius describes it thus:

> *This is inflicted as follows: The tribune takes a cudgel and just touches the condemned man with it, after which all in the camp beat or stone him, in most cases despatching him in the camp itself. But even those who manage to escape are not saved thereby: for they are not allowed to return to their homes, and none of the family would dare to receive such a man in his house. So that those who have once fallen into this misfortune are utterly ruined…*
> *If the same thing happens to large bodies, and if entire maniples desert their posts when exceedingly hard pressed, the officers refrain from inflicting the bastinado or the death penalty at all, but find a solution of the difficulty that is both salutary and terror-striking. The tribune assembles the legion, and brings up those guilty of leaving the ranks, reproaches them sharply, and finally chooses by lot sometimes five, sometimes eight, sometimes twenty of the offenders, so adjusting the number thus chosen that they form as near as possible the tenth part of those guilty of cowardice. Those on whom the lot falls are bastinadoed mercilessly in the manner above described; the rest receive rations of barley instead of wheat and are ordered to encamp outside the camp on an unprotected spot. As therefore the danger and dread of drawing the fatal lot affects all equally, as it is uncertain on whom it will fall; and as the public disgrace of receiving barley rations falls on all alike, this practice is that best calculated both to inspire fear and to correct the mischief.*

The Histories VI.37.2-4, 38.1-3

respectively. Yet in November 46BC he had to leave for Spain to fight the final campaign of the Civil War.

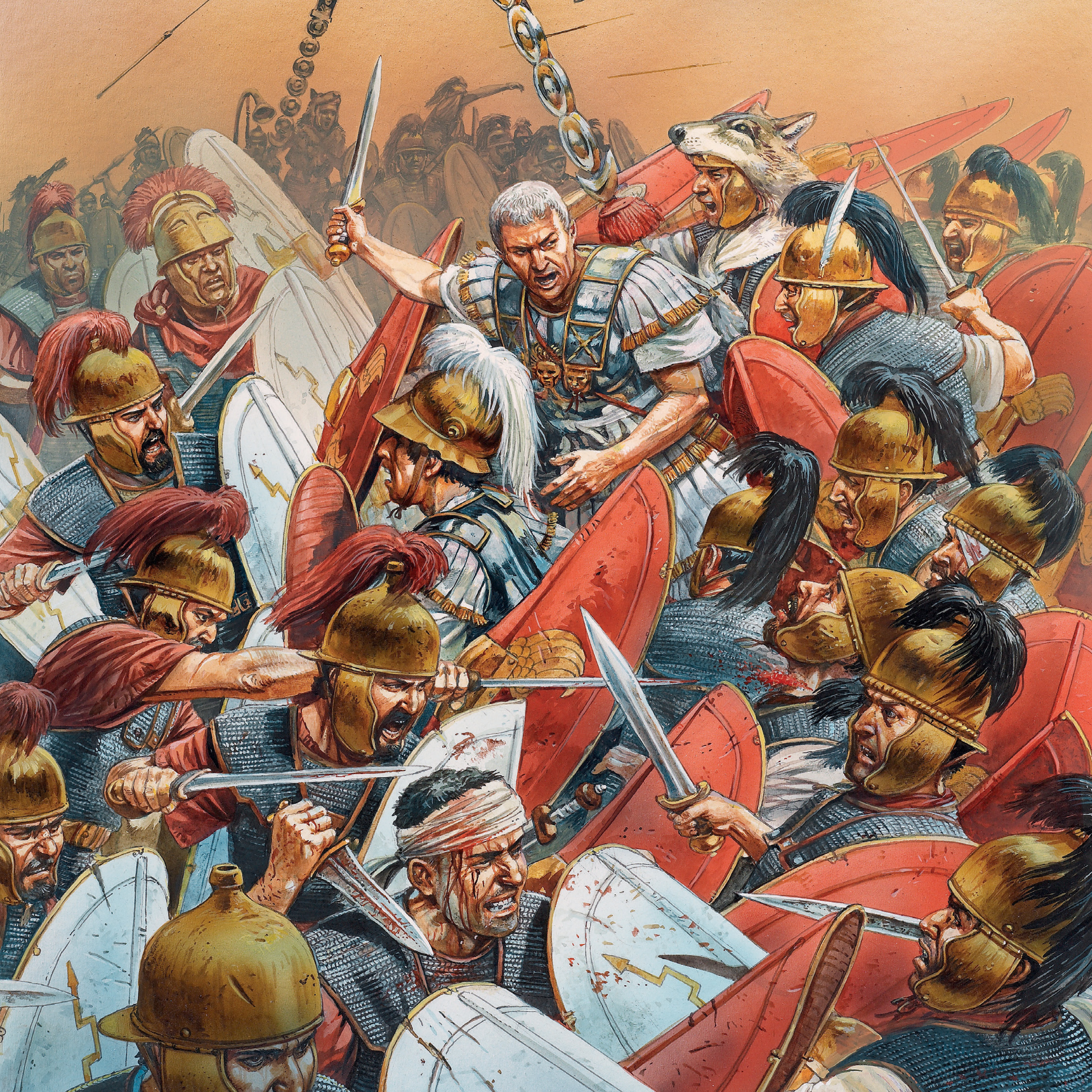
THE SPANISH CAMPAIGN

Cassius had proved both incompetent and corrupt as governor of Spain, alienating his own troops and the local population. By the time he was replaced by Caius Trebonius the situation was almost beyond redemption and the new governor was expelled by mutinous soldiers. Pompey's elder son Cnaeus arrived and was rapidly acclaimed as commander of the rebellious legions. He was soon joined by other Pompeians, including his brother Sextus and Labienus. A huge army of 13 legions and many auxiliaries was raised, although the quality of most of the new units was highly questionable.

Caesar travelled rapidly, as was his wont, covering the 1,500 miles to Corduba in just 27 days, and whiling away the trip by composing a poem, *The Journey*. He had eight legions, the old soldiers of Legio X, and 8,000 cavalry. The early stages of fighting included a number of fierce skirmishes, but Cnaeus Pompey was reluctant to risk a battle. It was already proving the most brutal campaign of the entire conflict.

The Pompeians were suffering a continual trickle of deserters. Men accused of publicly stating that they thought Caesar would win were arrested, and executed or imprisoned. In the middle of March, Caesar met Cnaeus Pompey at Munda. The fight

RIGHT The battle of Munda, in the words of Velleius Paterculus, was 'the bloodiest and most perilous Caesar had ever fought'. When he saw his war-trained veterans falter, he went to rally them personally, jumping from his horse and removing his helmet so they would recognise him, shaming them into standing firm. (Peter Dennis © Osprey Publishing)



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was fierce and determined, but Caesar prevailed, despite the fact that his army was fighting uphill. Munda was blockaded, the legionaries grimly fixing the severed heads of Pompeians to spikes topping their rampart. The mopping-up took several months. Caesar had won the Civil War, but now it remained to be seen whether he could win the peace. Unfortunately, he would not be given the time to find out.

On 15 February 44BC, Caesar's dictatorship and other powers were extended for life. A month later he was stabbed to death by a group of senators that included men who had served him for years, as well as pardoned Pompeians.

BECOMING AN EMPIRE

THE SECOND TRIUMVIRATE

Directly after Caesar's murder, Octavian, adopted son and heir of Caesar, formally took the name Caius Julius Caesar Octavianus and returned to Italy to rally a few of Caesar's veterans. He was just 19, but incredibly self-confident. Mark Antony failed to take him seriously, and anyway saw him as a rival for the loyalty of Caesar's supporters rather than as a useful ally. It was about this

LEFT Late Republican denarii with Mark Antony (left) and Augustus Caesar (right), first century BC. (Photo by CM Dixon/Print Collector/Getty Images) time that Antony and Cleopatra brought the child Caesarion into the public eye, presenting an actual son of Caesar to counter the adopted heir. Antony soon left for Cisalpine Gaul, taking charge of an enlarged army, with which he was in a position to threaten Rome. To those senators who hoped for a return to peace and stability and were broadly sympathetic to the conspirators, Antony was clearly the greatest threat to peace, for Caesar's other subordinate, Lepidus, was cautious by nature and unlikely to act of his own accord, even though he had command of the legions in Transalpine Gaul and Nearer Spain. Octavian was seen by the Senate as a useful figurehead to draw support away from Antony. Yet Octavian was building up his power, and rallied a force of veterans from Legio VII and VIII, and was soon joined by two more legions that were nominally under Antony's command, but answered the call of Caesar's heir.

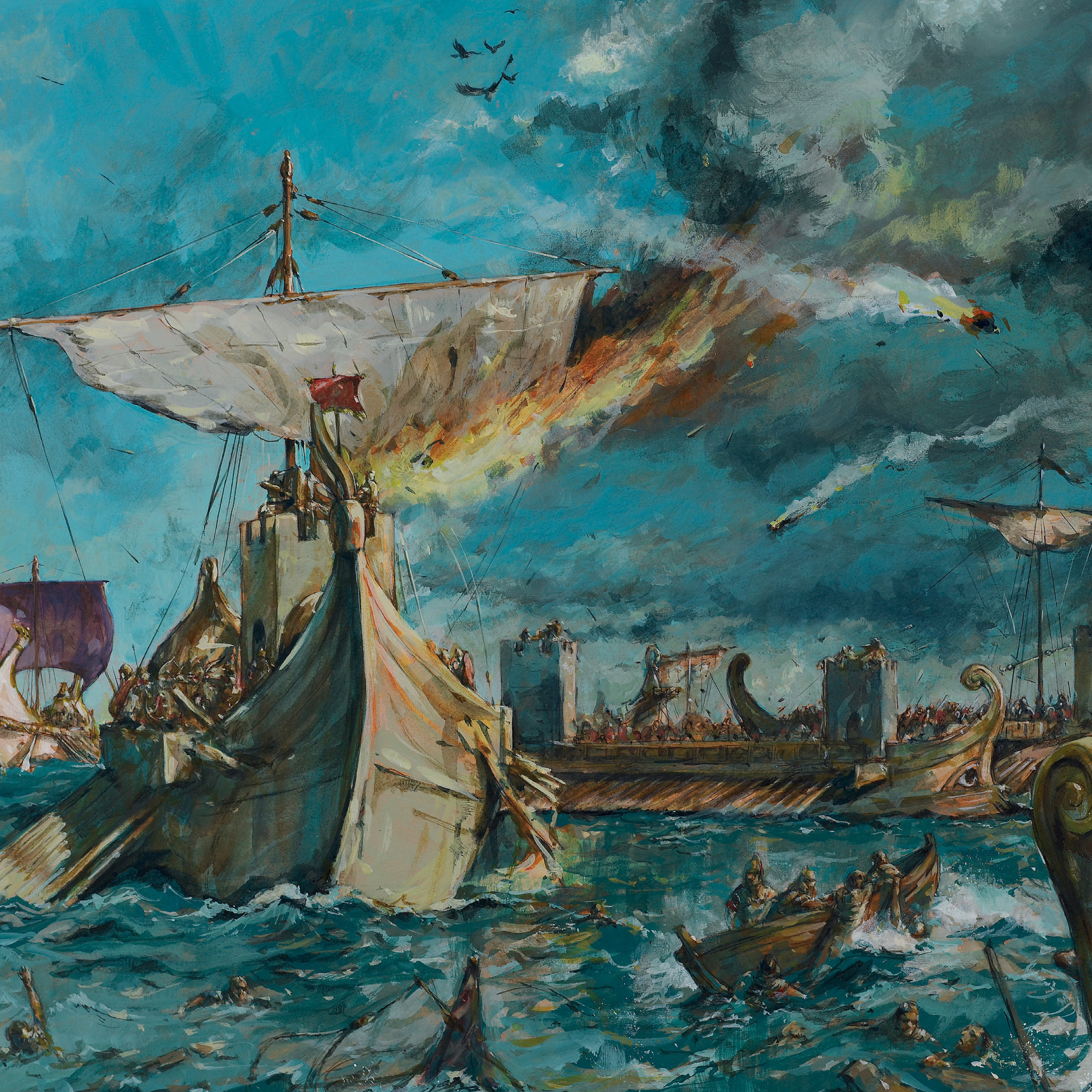
After clashes between Antony and Octavian's armies in Cisalpine Gaul, the two joined forces along with Lepidus, and together at the head of a huge army – altogether nearly 43 legions, though not all were present – they seized Rome, and on 27 November 43BC had a tribune pass a law by which they became triumvirs with consular powers to restore the state for five years. The need to avenge Caesar figured heavily in their propaganda, and the dead dictator was formally deified and a temple constructed for his cult. A comet seen in 44BC was proclaimed as a clear sign that Caesar had ascended to heaven after his murder, and from now on Octavian was regarded as the son of a god.

OCTAVIAN EMERGES AS CHAMPION

The success of the triumvirate could not last long, as each member became more concerned about their own realm of power. An abortive rising by Lepidus in Italy was swiftly defeated by Octavian, but Octavian displayed his father's clemency by sparing

Lepidus and allowing him to live out the rest of his life in comfortable retirement as Pontifex Maximus, Rome's most senior priest. In the meantime, Antony's obsession with Cleopatra was growing after her assistance in his ultimately disastrous war with the Parthians. Octavian's propagandists seized on this opportunity to depict Antony as a man so dominated by a sinister eastern seductress that he had betrayed his Roman origins. Octavian portrayed himself as the champion of all Italy against the eastern menace. War finally came in 31BC, and culminated in Antony's defeat at the naval battle of Actium. He and Cleopatra both escaped to Egypt, and committed suicide shortly afterwards.

Octavian was now unrivalled master of the Roman world, commanding an enormous army of some 60 legions. Militarily he was more secure than either Caesar or Sulla had been, but his actions soon showed that he had learned from the failures of both. When he returned to Rome in 29BC he formally laid down his powers, dissolving the triumvirate. Eventually he created the system known as the Principate, but this evolved gradually and there were more than a few false starts along the way. At first his power was still too blatant, for he held the consulship each year and there was resentment, especially whenever he left the city, but in time Octavian's public position was made to seem less monarchic. He made considerable effort to disassociate himself from Octavian the triumvir, and eventually he became, instead, Augustus, a name with deeply traditional associations, and the Father of his Country (*pater patriae*). To all intents and purposes Augustus was a monarch, for his power could not be opposed by any constitutional means, yet he managed to maintain the illusion that he was not the master of the state, but its servant, a magistrate like all the other magistrates save that his authority, and his continued services to the state, were greater.



THE ROMAN ARMIES OF THE CIVIL WAR

Rome's civil wars split the state into factions, and the army with it. Since there were no ethnic, ideological or social differences between the rival sides it was inevitable – even more than in any other civil war – that the organisation, tactical doctrine and equipment of their armies was virtually identical.

THE LEGION

The main strength of the Roman army lay in the legions, units with a strength on paper of about 5,000. In this period, a legion consisted entirely of heavy infantry. In theory the legions were recruited only from Roman citizens, but during the civil wars many non-citizens were enlisted to bolster numbers. In his *Commentaries,* Caesar frequently emphasised the heterogeneous nature of the enemy armies, but he had himself formed an entire legion, Legio V Alaudae, from Gauls, only later giving them the franchise as a reward for distinguished service. Given the dominance of the Roman military system, some allied kings had remodelled their armies after the Roman style. King Juba of Numidia included four legions in his large army, while Deiotarus of Galatia formed two that would later be amalgamated and formed into Legio XXII Deiotariana as a fully fledged part of the Roman army.

The basic tactical unit of the legion was the cohort of some 480 men. There were ten of these in each legion, and the cohort in turn was subdivided into six centuries of 80.

LEFT The climax of the battle of Actium occurred at mid-afternoon, when the breeze had strengthened to the point that Cleopatra's reserve squadron could hoist sail and clear Octavian's blockade. Here we see Antony's hard-pressed front-line ships attempting to disengage, but with little hope of success. (Christa Hook © Osprey Publishing)

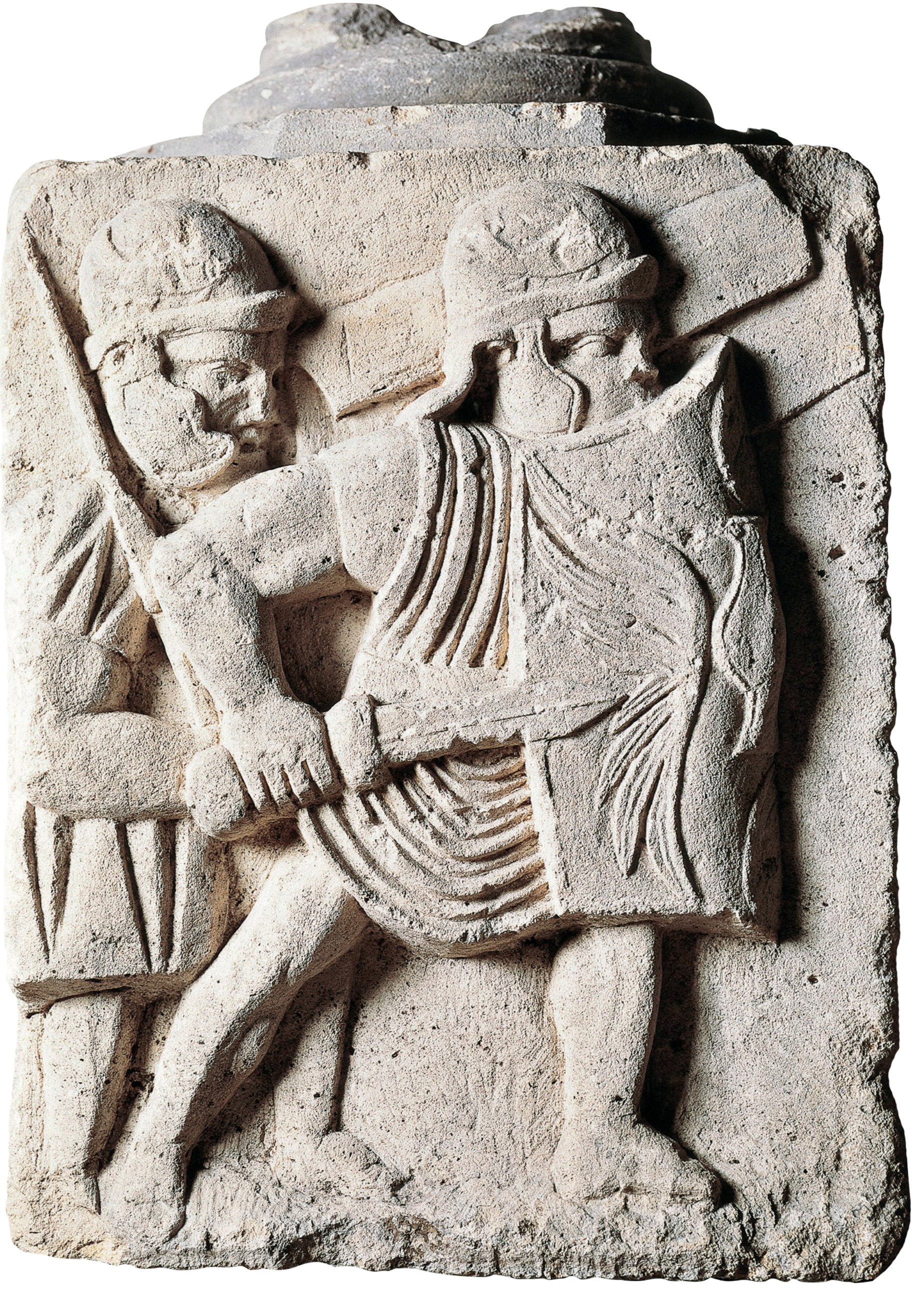
RECRUITMENT

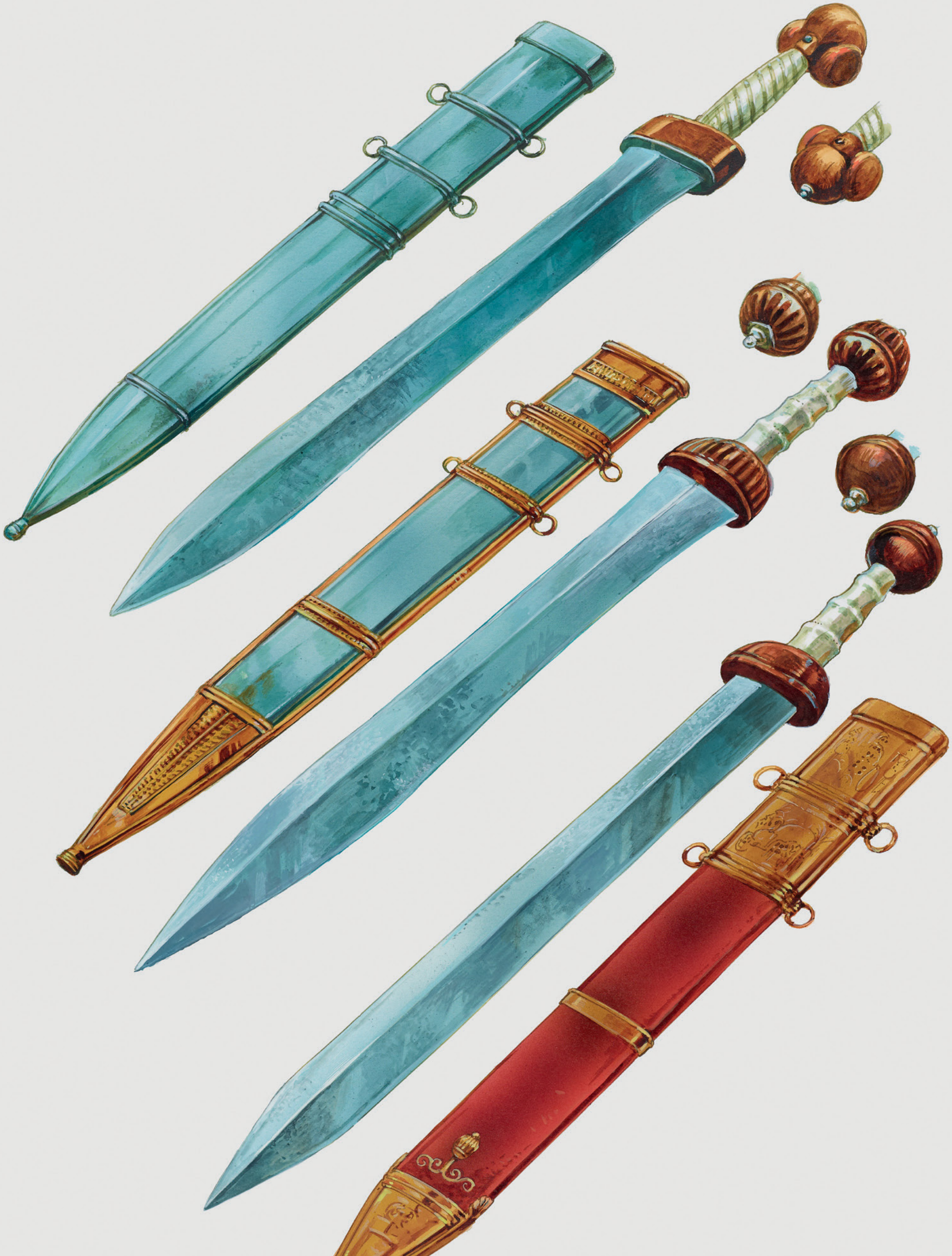
Traditionally, all Roman male citizens between the ages of 17 and 46 were liable for military service. Most recruits to the legion were between 17 and 23, with the peak age of enlistment being 20, but recruits as young as 13 and 14, and as old as 36, are known. The majority of legionaries claimed origin (*origio*) in a town or city, but few actually came from urban centres. Most cities were centres of agricultural trade and had substantial rural territories attached to them. Some parts of the Empire were particularly devoid of urbanisation and in many cases origins were simply spurious, granted at enlistment with Roman citizenship.

Peasant farmers had been the backbone of the citizen militia of the Republic, and the country remained the favoured source of recruits until the late Empire. Recruits with agricultural backgrounds were preferred for their endurance and because they were unaffected by the sleazier distractions of city life. Vegetius, writing in the late fourth century AD, said of rural recruits:

> They are nurtured under the open sky in a life of work, enduring the sun, careless of shade, unacquainted with bathhouses, simple-souled, content with a little, with limbs toughened to endure every kind of toil, and for whom wielding iron, digging a ditch and carrying a burden is what they are used to from the country.

RIGHT This frieze from the headquarters building of the legionary fortress at Mainz in Germany dates to over a century after the Civil War, but it gives a good idea of the classic fighting stance of the legionary – crouching slightly to gain the maximum protection from his shield, with his left leg advanced and sword thrust underarm. (DEA PICTURE LIBRARY/De Agostini/Getty Images)





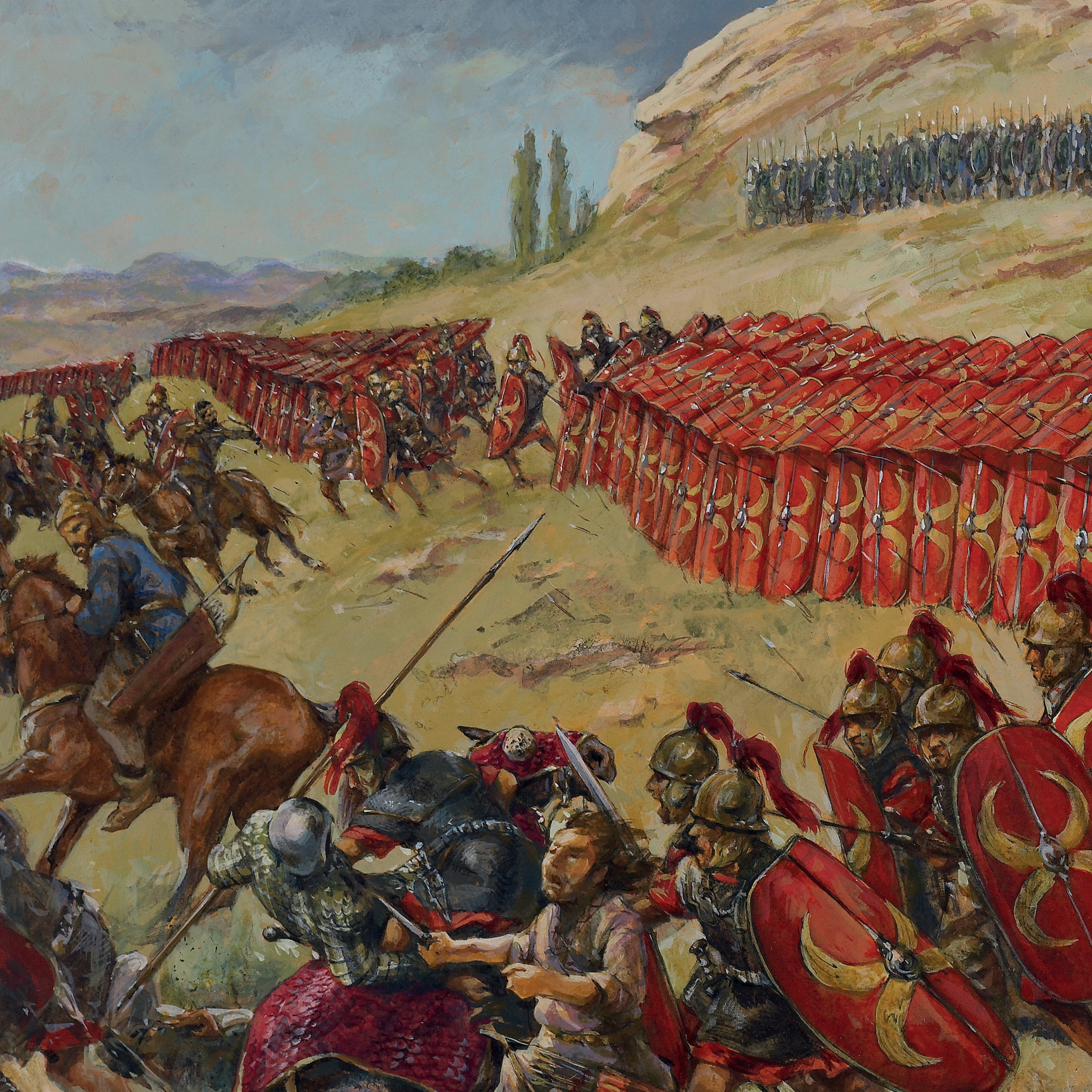
Many legionaries, if not the majority, were conscripts, and not necessarily educated to any great standard. The levy of such recruits was necessitated by the huge scale of the civil wars.

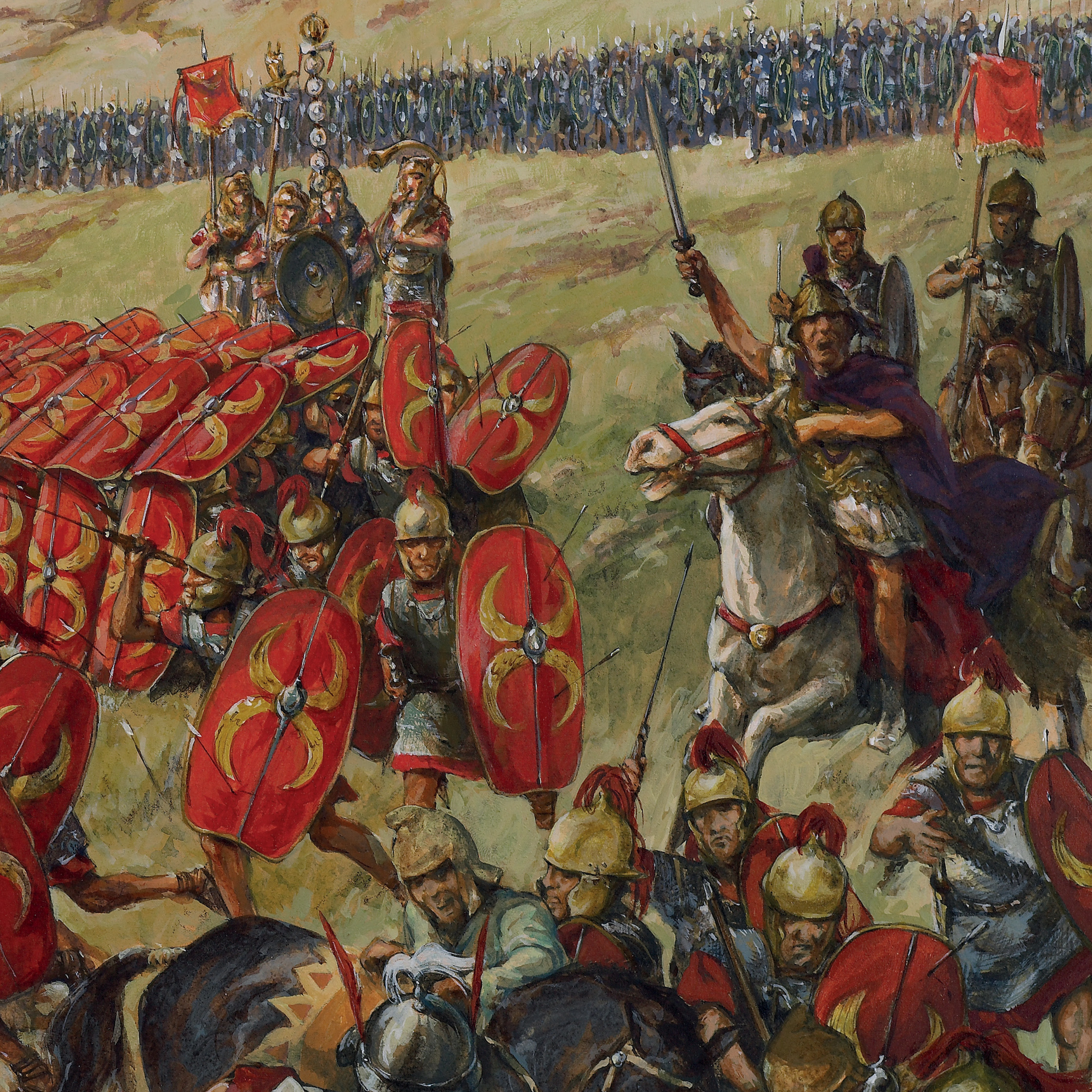
TRAINING

Legionary recruits trained daily for four gruelling months. Training began with practising the military steps. Recruits were required to march 29km in five hours at the regular step, and 35km in five hours at the faster step, loaded with a pack about 20.5kg (45lb) in weight. This burden was merely for acclimatisation; the weight of a legionary's arms and armour alone could be far greater. Strict maintenance of the ranks was enforced during drill, the centurions and training officers using their staffs to beat any laggards. Once the recruits could march in time and follow the commands relayed by the trumpets and standards, manoeuvres were practised endlessly. They practised different formations: the hollow square, wedge, circle, and the *testudo* ('the tortoise' – a mobile formation entirely protected by a roof and wall of shields). They were trained in overcoming obstacles, in charging and breaking off combat, in changing lines and relieving engaged units. The recruit was also taught to spring out of the line – this might prove useful in combat.

Weapons training was conducted with swords, javelins and shields made of wood and wicker but twice the weight of the real thing. These weapons were used against 1.8m (6ft)

LEFT Three types of *gladius* and their respective scabbards. The *gladius Hispaniensis* (top), a weapon long enough for both cavalry and infantry to use, was suitable for both chopping and stabbing. The Mainz-type sword (middle) is shorter and suitable for cutting and thrusting. The Pompeii-type sword (bottom) is the smallest and lightest of the three blades, apparently intended as a thrusting weapon but still used to both cut and thrust. (Peter Dennis © Osprey Publishing)





PREVIOUS PAGE Mark Antony's legionaries adopt the signature defensive move, the *testudo*, against Parthian horse archers in his retreat from Media Atropatene in 37 BC. According to Plutarch, 'those in the first rank knelt on one knee, holding their shields before them, the next rank holding theirs over the first, and so again'. (Christa Hook © Osprey Publishing)

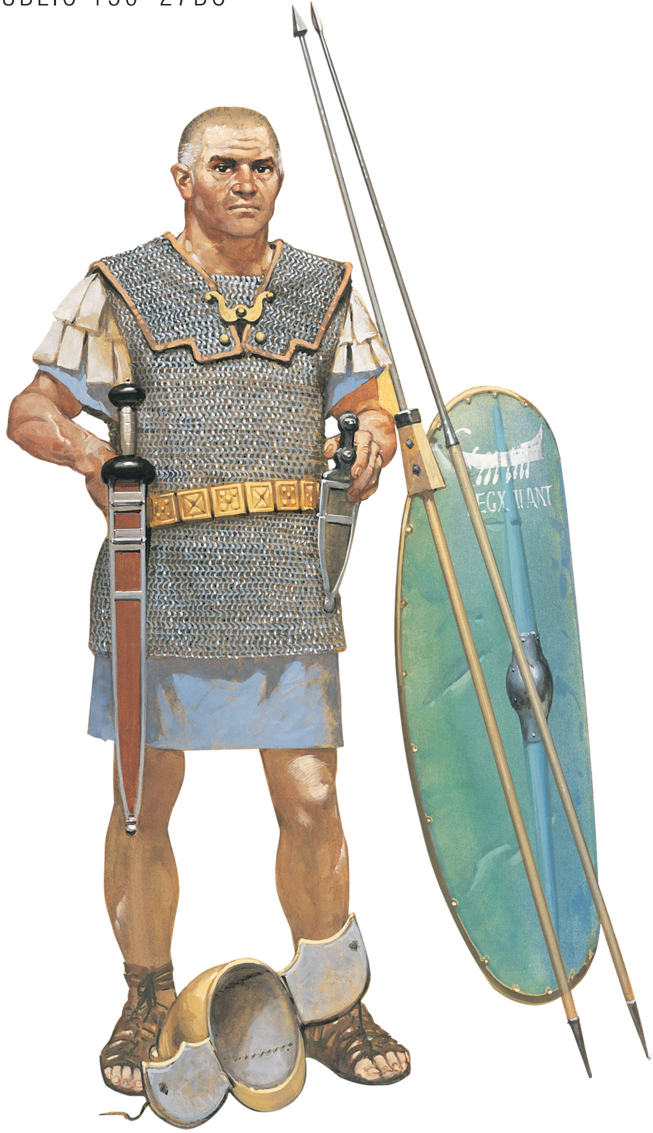
practice posts. The instructors emphasised covering the body effectively with the shield while using the sword point instead of the edge, for this caused deeper wounds and was more efficient than slashing. Weapons training might occur twice a day.

If possible, recruits were also taught to swim so that a campaigning army's advance would not be impeded by rivers. They were also given cursory instruction in archery, the sling and riding, so that they had knowledge of all arms.

WEAPONS AND ARMOUR

All legionaries were equipped with the same basic defensive gear, consisting of a bronze helmet (most often of Montefortino or Coolus pattern), cuirass (usually mail but sometimes of scale), and a large semi-cylindrical body shield constructed from three layers of plywood to give it both flexibility and strength. The latter seem most often to have been oval in shape, but it is possible that the transition to a more rectangular shape was already under way. Such shields were heavy – reconstructed examples weighing in at 10kg (22lbs) – but offered good protection. They could also be used offensively, the soldier punching forward with all his bodyweight behind the shield's bronze boss. We are told that one of Caesar's soldiers, in spite of having his right hand chopped off almost as soon as he had boarded a warship, was able to clear the deck of enemies by knocking them down with his shield during the fighting off Massila.

A soldier's other offensive equipment consisted of a short sword, the famed *gladius*, sometimes a dagger, and the *pilum* or heavy throwing javelin. The *pilum* consisted of a wooden shaft just over a metre (four feet) long topped by a narrow iron shank about half a metre (two feet) in length and ending in a pyramid-shaped point. When thrown, all of its great weight was concentrated behind this small tip, giving it formidable penetrative power. It was designed so that once it punched through an enemy's shield, the slim iron shank would slide easily through the hole made by the point, and had the reach to wound the man behind. Soldiers may have carried two *pila* on campaign, but only one on the day of battle itself.



RIGHT A veteran marine of Legio XII Antiqua. (Angus McBride © Osprey Publishing)

ORGANISATION AND DEPLOYMENT

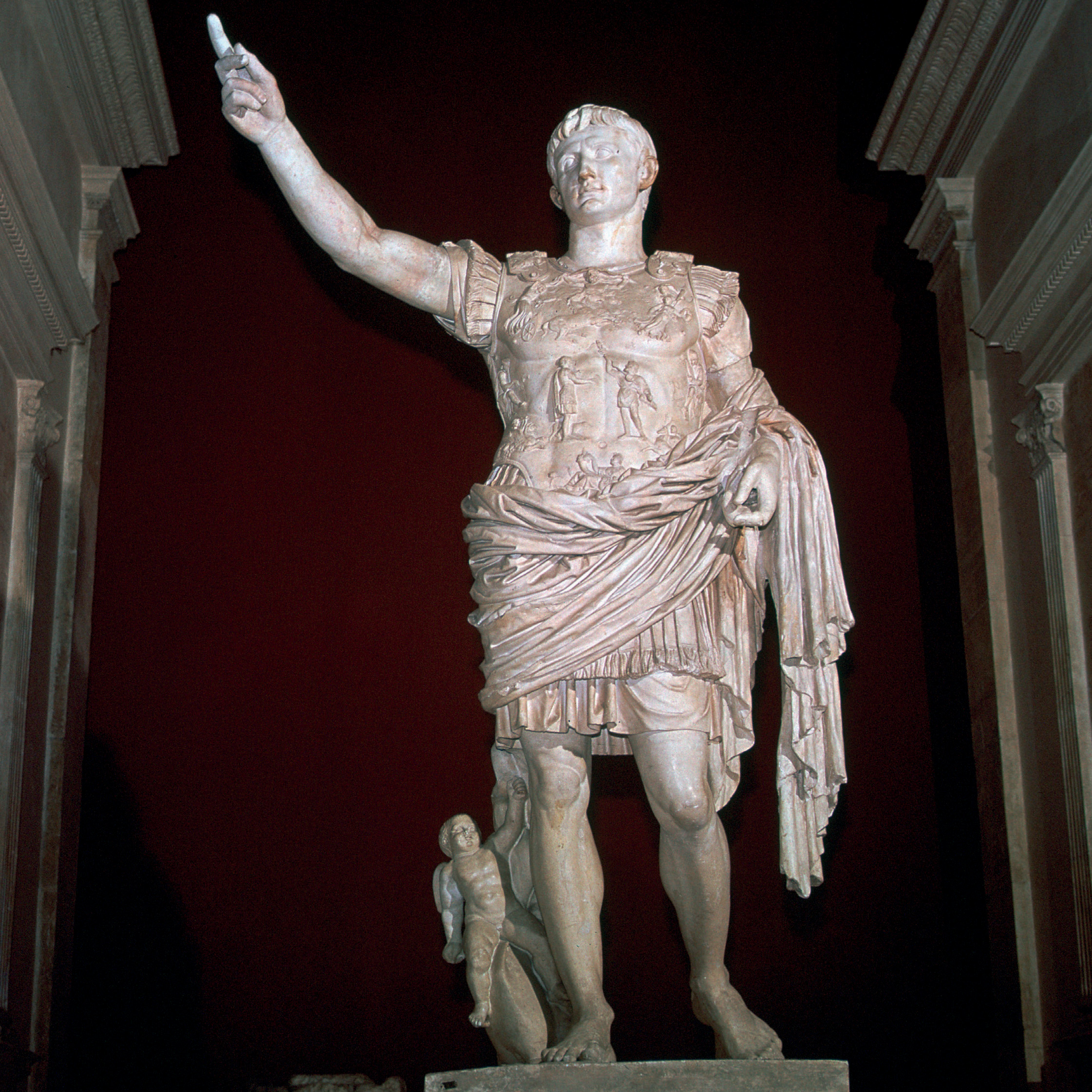
In battle, a legion most often formed in three lines, four cohorts in the first line and three in the second and third. Intervals were maintained between each unit and the cohorts from the next line stationed to cover these gaps, creating something resembling a chequerboard formation. However, since all cohorts were armed uniformly, the legion was perfectly capable of fighting effectively in other formations, and we also hear of armies in four or two lines, although a single line was considered too brittle to be employed save in dire need. The legion was a very flexible force. Its structure and size made it an important subunit within the battle line, but one or several cohorts could as easily be detached for smaller operations.

The cohort is traditionally viewed as the primary tactical unit of the legion. This is certainly the impression given by Caesar and Tacitus, who tell of formations and tactics based around the cohort. However, it has been suggested that the cohort could not function as a tactical unit because it had no commander or obvious standard of its own, leaving the century as the primary tactical unit. When Caesar and Tacitus speak of cohorts moving in a battle we should view them as groupings of centuries fighting in support of each other.

As with all armies throughout history, theoretical unit sizes were rarely reflected in the field. At Pharsalus in 48BC the cohorts of Pompey's legions averaged around 400 men apiece, while Caesar's force was little more than half that size. Campaign attrition reduced one of Caesar's legions to less than 1,000 men during the Egyptian campaign.

ALLIES AND AUXILIARIES

The legions were the mainstay of any army, especially decisive in pitched battles, but both sides supplemented their numbers with allied soldiers or auxiliaries, fighting in their own traditional style. Such troops were especially useful in providing cavalry and light infantry. In most cases they were locally recruited and led by their own native chieftains. At first Caesar's auxiliaries came primarily from the Gallic and German tribes, and Pompey's from his provinces in Spain and his many clients in the east, but as the war progressed, troops were recruited wherever possible and the pattern became more complex.



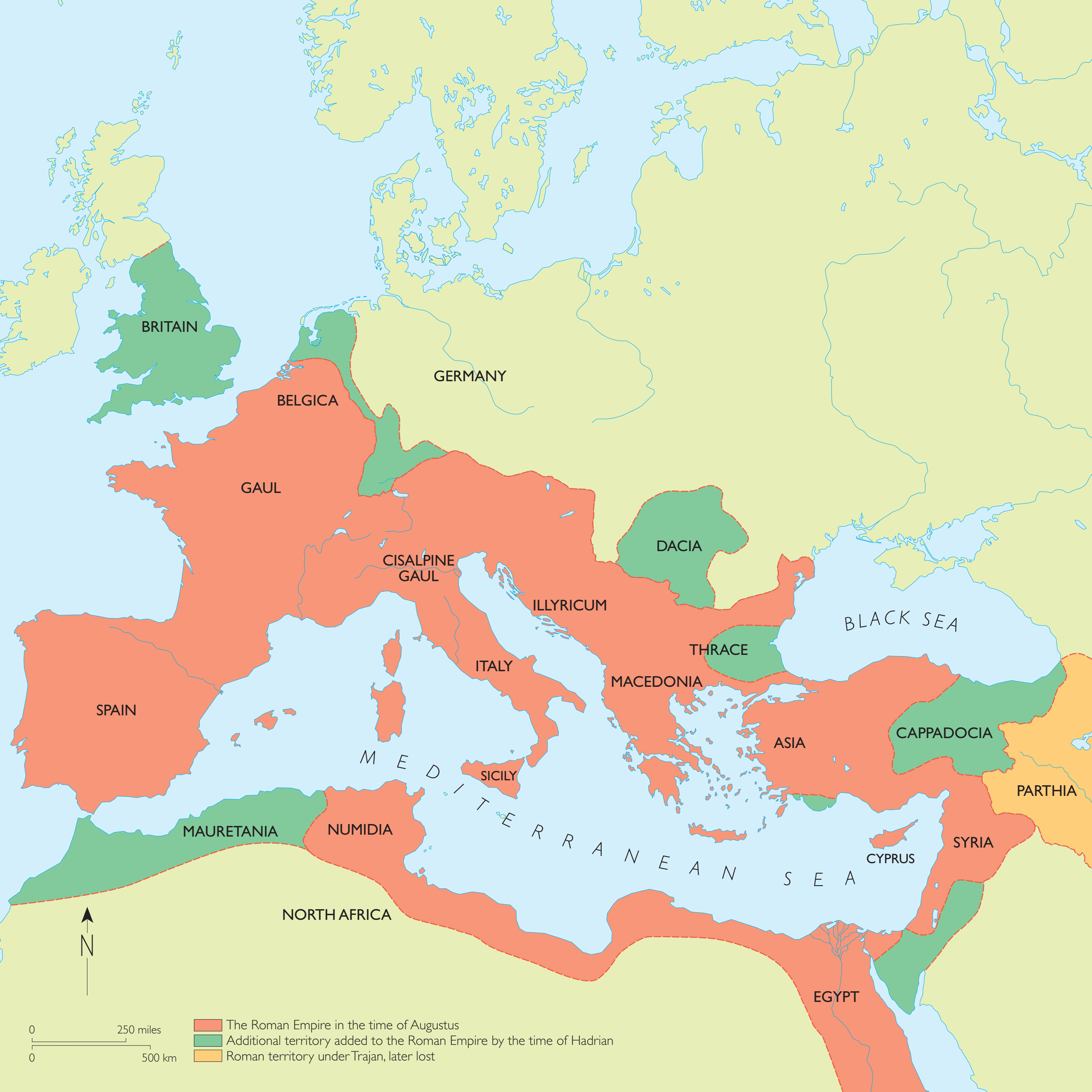
THE EARLY EMPIRE 27BC–AD235

The early imperial period of Rome's history was marked by threats to the security of the now-immense Empire, and internal struggles as the city tried to reconcile the monarchic powers of an emperor with the republican ideals of its forebears...

An emperor's power relied on his military force and strength, and many foreign wars at this time were attempts either to prove this strength, or protect weaknesses from exploitation. Inside Rome, the corruption of emperors and their governments meant the priority was often personal gain, and survival.

Military power lay behind the Augustan regime, but attention was rarely drawn to this. Most of the Republic's institutions persisted. The Senate was reformed and

LEFT Statue of Augustus Caesar from Prima Porta, Rome, first century BC. Augustus made a point of distributing his idealised image throughout the Empire. (Photo by CM Dixon/Print Collector/Getty Images)


BRITAIN
GERMANY
BELGICA
GAUL
DACIA
CISALPINE GAUL
ILLYRICUM
BLACK SEA
THRACE
SPAIN
ITALY
MACEDONIA
ASIA
CAPPADOCIA
PARTHIA
SICILY
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
MAURETANIA
NUMIDIA
SYRIA
CYPRUS
NORTH AFRICA
EGYPT
N
0 250 miles
0 500 km
🟥 The Roman Empire in the time of Augustus
🟩 Additional territory added to the Roman Empire by the time of Hadrian
🟧 Roman territory under Trajan, later lost

reduced in size to remove many of the less suitable men who had been enrolled in reward for dubious favours to the various sides in the civil wars. More Italians were included, and in time senators would come from the aristocratic families of many of the provinces. Augustus attended the Senate as simply another member, if a highly distinguished one, and encouraged the members to debate freely and to vote with their conscience. Augustus may have genuinely desired them to do this, but in practice this was a sham. Every senator knew that his future career depended on the emperor's favour, and so the vast majority said what they felt he wanted them to say. Both the senators and emperor wished publicly to pretend that Rome had not become a monarchy, politely ignoring the obvious reality.

From early in his reign Augustus began to groom a successor, although the high mortality rate within the imperial family (four prospective successors died before his step-son Tiberius was named as heir) meant that quite a few individuals filled this role. When Augustus finally died in AD14 at the age of 76, Tiberius, then aged 56, had his powers formally voted to him by the Senate and at first feigned reluctance to take on the role. By this time scarcely anyone could conceive of, or remember, life without an emperor.

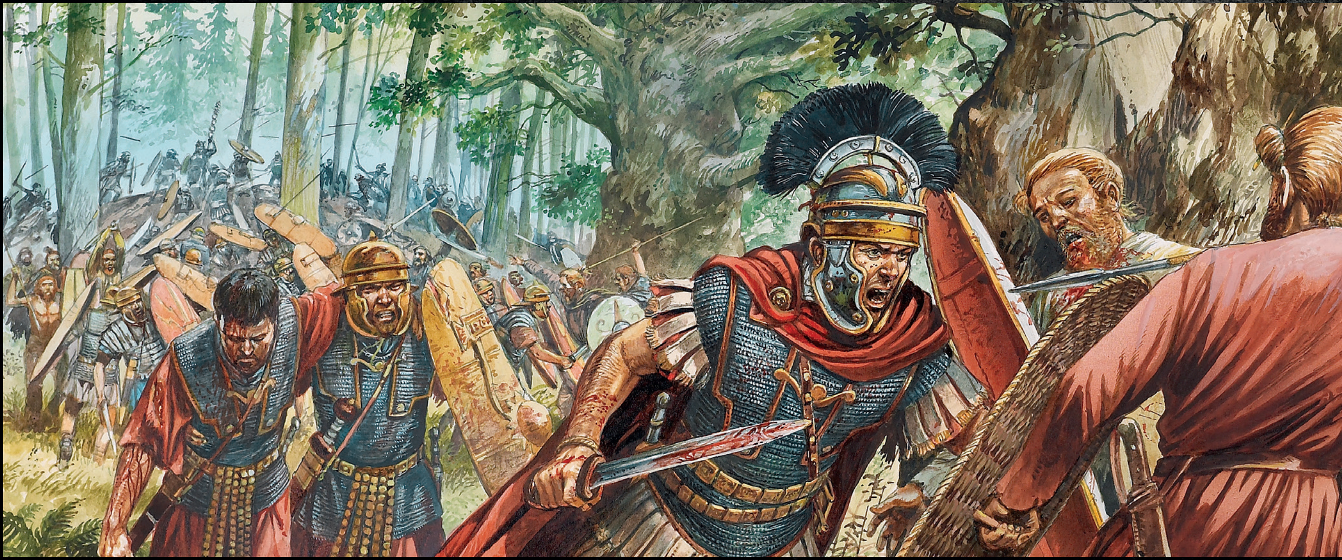
FOREIGN FIGHTING

The wars fought with foreign enemies during this period were not as aggressively expansionist as those of earlier years, since there remained little of the Mediterranean and immediate regions that had not already been consumed by the Roman Empire. Augustus did attempt to push the Empire's borders back beyond the Rhine, but an entire Roman force of three legions was wiped out in AD9 in the Teutoburg forest,

THE BATTLE OF TEUTOBURGERWALD

In the early years of the first century AD Rome decided to rationalise the northern frontier of her Empire by annexing Germany up to the Elbe. Quinctilius Varus, acting on the information of Hermann (Arminius), the trusted Cherusci war chief and former auxiliary officer in the Roman army, led the XVII, XVIII and XIX legions in autumn AD9 to contain a rebellion in partially subdued territory. Expecting to rendezvous with levies from the Cherusci, Varus was himself led into an ambush prepared by Hermann in the Teutoburg forest. Constrained by wooded hills to the left, marshes to the right, and turf walls to the front, the Roman army sustained the initial attack, but having been marching through 'friendly' territory it was strung out and disorderly and ultimately unable to extricate itself. The continual hit-and-run tactics of the Cherusci increased disorder and panic, and only a few soldiers survived to return across the river Rhine.

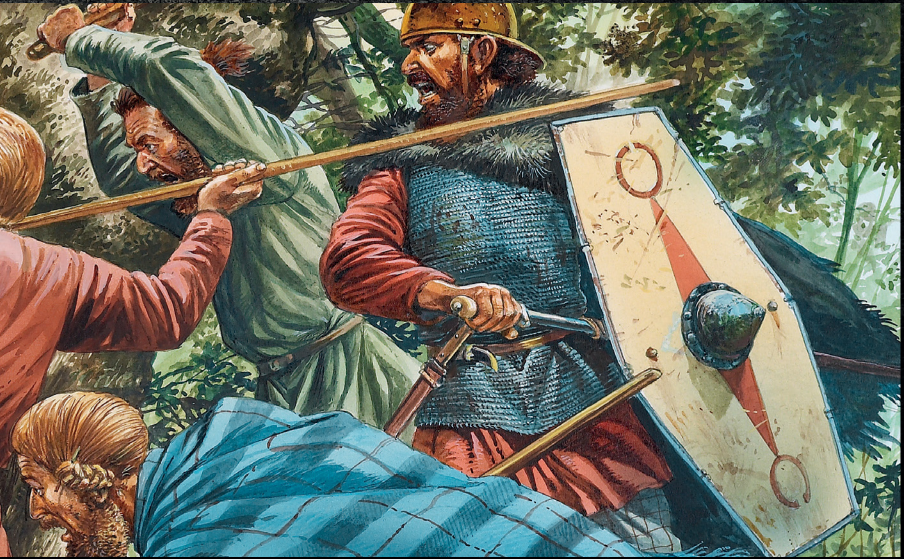
Velleius Paterculus, who served as a legionary legate during the Illyrian Revolt of AD6–9, witnessed



the battle of Teutoburger Forest first hand. His account emphasises that the disintegration and destruction of Quinctilius Varus' army was caused by the poor leadership and cowardice of Varus and his senior officers:

> *An army unexcelled in bravery, the first of the Roman armies in discipline, energy and experience on the field, through negligence of its general, the treachery of the enemy and the unkindness of Fortune was surrounded, nor was as much opportunity as they had wished given to the soldiers either of fighting or of extricating themselves, except against heavy odds; indeed, some were even chastised for using their weapons and showing the spirit of the Romans. Hemmed in by forest, marshes and ambuscades, it was destroyed almost to a man by the very enemy it had always slaughtered like cattle…the general had more courage to die than to fight …* [and] *ran himself through with his sword. The two camp prefects … after most of the army had been destroyed, proposed its surrender, preferring to die by torture … than in battle.* [The legate] *Vala Numonius … previously an honourable man, set a fearful example by leaving the infantry unprotected by the cavalry, attempting to flee to the Rhine. Fortune avenged his act … he died in the act of desertion. Varus' body, partially burned, was mutilated by the enemy; his head cut off.*
>
> Velleius Paterculus, 2.119

The indisputable outcome of this disaster was that Roman plans for the eventual control of all of Germania were permanently abandoned.



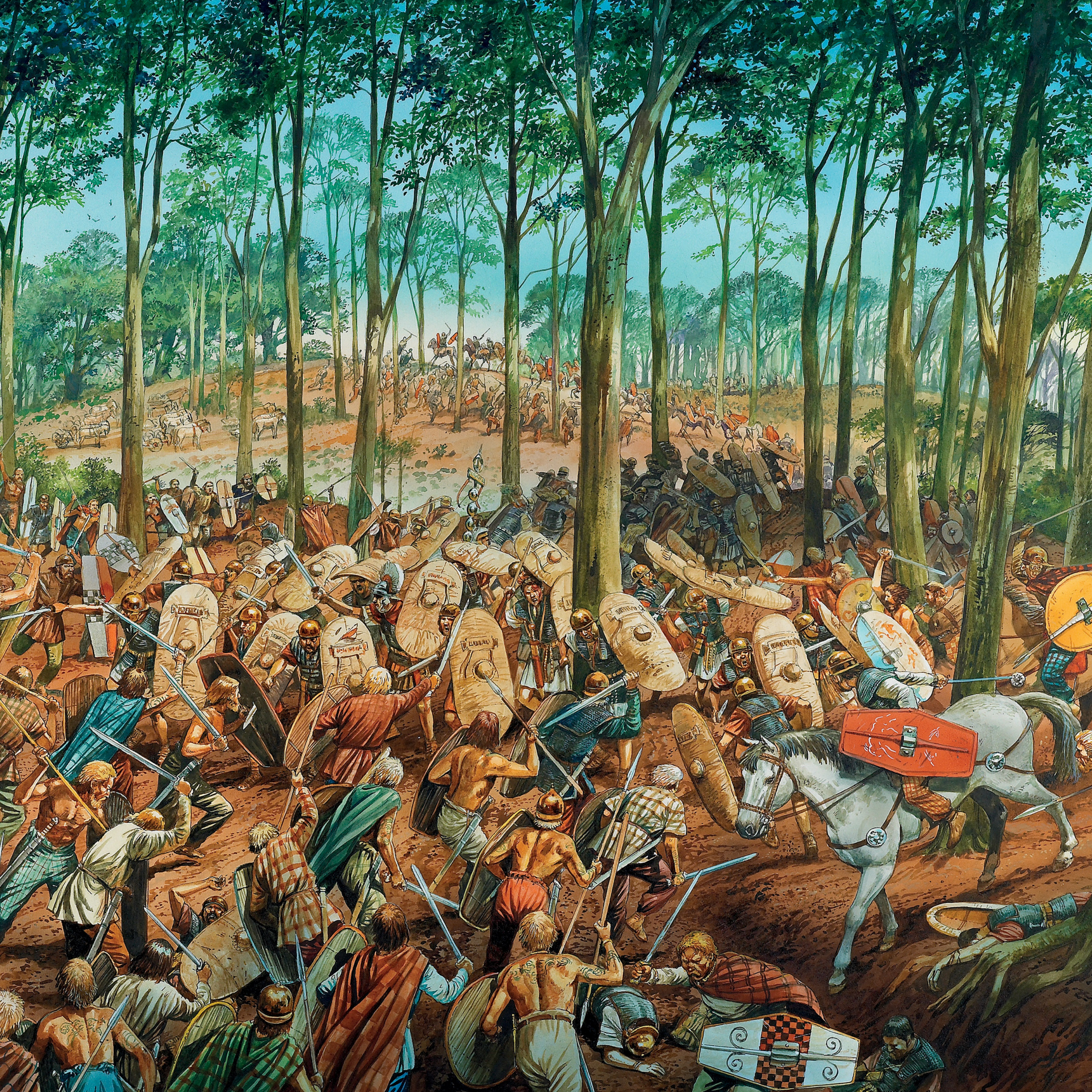
A centurion of one of Varus' legions is attacked by tribesmen of the Bructeri, allies of the Cherusci, who are harassing and ambushing the Roman column. (Peter Dennis © Osprey Publishing)

resulting in Augustus bringing his troops back behind the Rhine, and suggesting to Tiberius not to attempt to push the boundaries further. Threats to the Empire's stability caused constant concern, and saw the emperors taking their armies on hard-fought campaigns for security and stability.

CLAUDIUS' INVASION OF BRITAIN

Claudius unexpectedly became emperor in AD41 when his nephew Caligula, heir of Tiberius, was assassinated. Needing military success to consolidate his position, he embarked on the conquest of southern Britain in AD43, an enterprise originally planned by his predecessor. The invasion force was composed of four legions and auxiliary forces under the command of Aulus Plautius. Advancing rapidly, the Roman forces won a major victory outside Camulodunum (Colchester) and the emperor entered the tribal capital in triumph on an elephant. Claudius quickly accepted the surrender of 11 tribal kings before returning to Rome and leaving Plautius behind as governor of Britain. Although the conquest had begun well, the complete submission of Britain to Rome was to take much more time and effort. One by one, each of the native British Celtic was either crushed, or became a client kingdom. Caractacus, son of the Catuvellaunian king Cunobelinus, attempted to lead a revolt among a number of tribes, but was eventually captured after being betrayed by another tribal leader, Cartimandua, leader of the Brigantes. Another serious uprising under Boudicca, queen of the Iceni tribe, in 60AD was eventually

RIGHT Here we see the ambush of a Roman detachment in Britain by British tribesmen of Boudicca's rebellion. Knowing they must avoid a standing fight, the Britons have emerged from a wooded area to fall upon an isolated unit, with chariots and cavalry. (Peter Dennis © Osprey Publishing)



suppressed, but not before the sacking of many major Roman towns, including Colchester, St Albans and London.

In AD77, the new governor of Britain, Agricola, decided to bring the tribes of Wales and Scotland under his command. He oversaw a dreadful massacre of the Druids on the island of Anglesey, and campaigned further and further north until he reached Perthshire. He was unable to subdue the tribes north of there, and they remained free from the yoke of Roman rule for the duration of the Empire. In AD122, the Emperor Hadrian decided to set the British boundary of Roman lands at the Tyne–Solway line, and for the next 17 years he oversaw the construction of a wall, Hadrian's Wall, to attempt to keep the northern tribes from making incursions on Roman territory. Britain, now the Roman province of Britannia, enjoyed a couple of centuries of relative peace until around 300AD, when the barbarian threat to Roman lands in Europe saw the withdrawal of some of the troops in Britain to help in central Europe. In the absence of much protection from Rome, the Romano-Britons started to receive more attacks from the neighbouring British Picts and Celts. Eventually, in AD410 the Emperor Constantine removed the whole of the Roman garrison in Britain to the Rhine frontier to attempt to defend it from the Goths. The Romans never returned to Britain.

WARS WITH THE GERMANICS AND DACIANS

Throughout the history of the Roman Empire, its northern frontier with the lands of Germanic and Dacian tribes had always been vulnerable, due, largely, to the

LEFT A section of Hadrian's Wall, Walltown Crags, Northumberland, England. Although the remains of the wall are only a few courses high, the original wall was 4.5m (15ft) high with 1.8m (6ft) battlements on top of it. (Photo by DeAgostini/Getty Images) ferocity of these tribes as fighters, and their constant need to migrate to cope with their mounting population problems. Stability along this frontier required active defence, and there were major campaigns commanded by an emperor in the 90s (Domitian), 170s (Marcus Aurelius) and 230s (Severus Alexander). The Rhine provided a partial barrier to tribal movement, which the Romans could control through naval squadrons and by supervising recognised crossing-points. Beyond the Rhine were numerous tribal groups whose relationship with the Romans was not always hostile: tribesmen served in Roman armies, Roman garrisons had considerable wealth (by local standards) to spend on slaves, furs or basic foodstuffs, while the Romans were a source of luxury goods such as wine or spices. A symbiotic relationship could emerge, and a cyclical pattern to relations on the frontier can be seen: the Romans bolstered the authority of compliant leaders whose expanding following generated greater demands; when these became excessive, conflict ensued between Rome and a major tribal grouping; thereafter the cycle would begin again.

The second major European river frontier, along the Danube, was joined to the Rhine frontier by linear defences. In the first century AD a process of consolidation similar to that on the Rhine got under way, and the need to dominate the Dacian tribes of the lower Danube led to major campaigns across the river under the Emperor Trajan (98–117) in the early second century.

THE PARTHIAN WARS

Only in the east did the Romans face an enemy with a sophistication comparable to their own. In the eastern Empire the Romans encountered the Parthians during the first century BC, experiencing one of their worst defeats in 53BC when three legions were annihilated at Carrhae (Harran) in Mesopotamia. Until the mid-first century AD, small client kingdoms constituted buffer states for Roman territory in Anatolia and the Levant. Thereafter the upper and middle Euphrates provided a suitable line on which to base legionary positions – though, as along the Rhine and the Danube, the Romans maintained a keen interest in events beyond. Between the river Euphrates and the Arabian Gulf, desert offered a reliable buffer zone, although tribes who knew how to operate in this inhospitable terrain troubled Roman lands to the west intermittently. For the Romans the east was the prestigious area for conflict, ideally for expansion, with the renown of Alexander the Great's achievements luring successive western rulers to emulation: in AD20, Augustus Caesar regained the Armenian and Transcaucasian lands lost the year before Carrhae, and the Parthians returned the Roman standards lost at Carrhae. However, when a new Armenian ruler was appointed by the Parthian king Vologases I in the 60s, the Romans felt their power was being threatened, and their commander Cnaeus Domitius Corbulo invaded Armenia. It was finally decided that the Parthians could have their own prince, but that he must be approved and controlled by Rome.

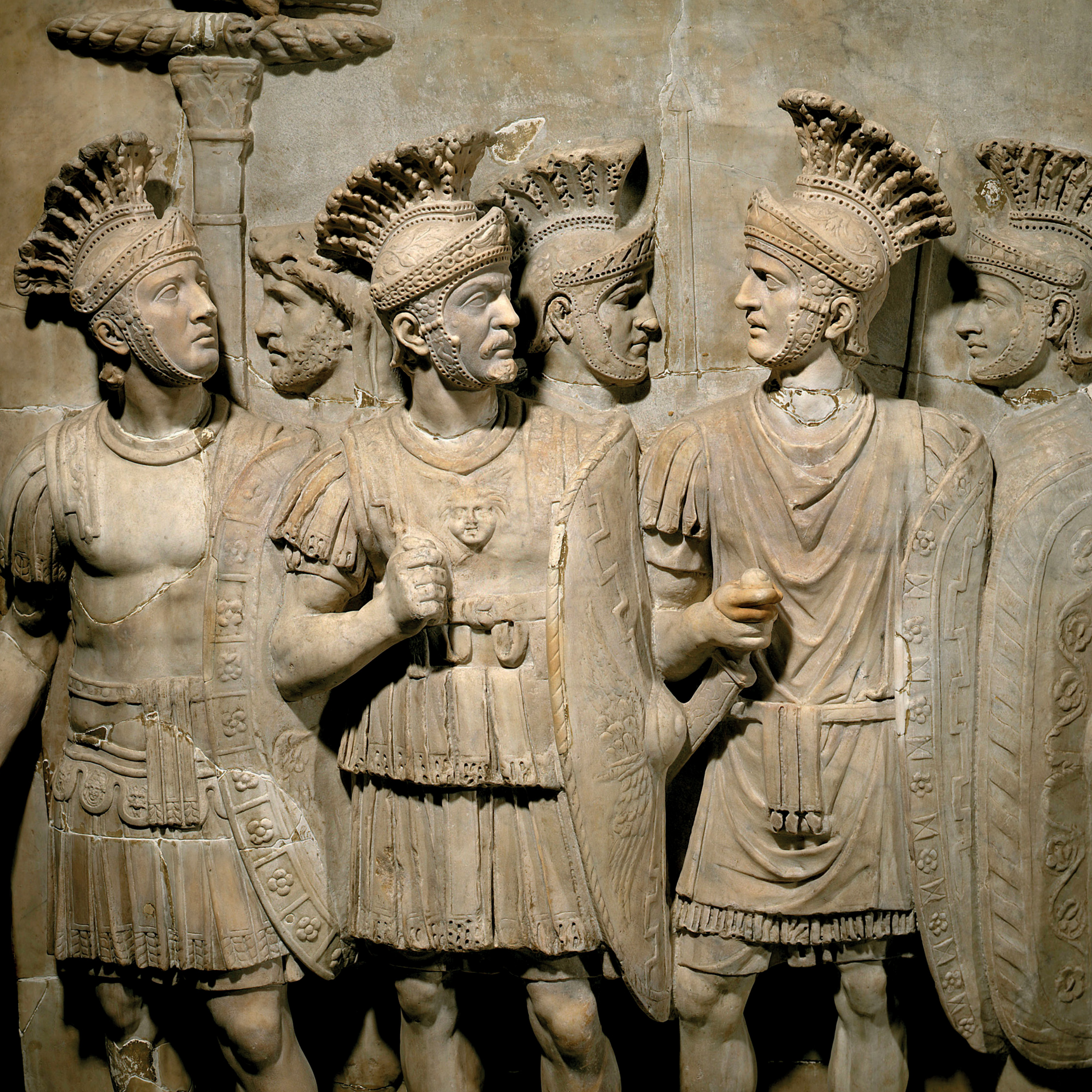
This arrangement worked for a while, until 114 when Vologases III dethroned an Armenian leader, and the Emperor Trajan (98–117) invaded Parthia. Roman success was decisive, and Trajan campaigned to the head of the Persian Gulf, briefly establishing a province in Mesopotamia; in the 160s Lucius Verus (161–69) fought energetically in Lower Mesopotamia, and in the 190s Septimius Severus (193–211) again defeated the Parthians and annexed new territory. In 226 the Parthian monarchy was overthrown by the Sassanid Persians, who in 260 captured the Roman emperor Valerian, and successively reduced Roman fortresses in Mesopotamia.

ROMAN MILITARY REFORM: AUGUSTUS AND THE ARMY

Before he became emperor, Octavian remodelled the army into a permanent force of 28 legions. The support of the army was crucial to him because as emperor, Augustus' powers rested on military force. For the first time Rome received a permanent garrison. The emperor had his Praetorian Guard, and also formed a police force (the Urban Cohorts) and fire brigade (the Vigiles). All of these troops were kept directly under his personal control. He also took great care to ensure the loyalty of the army. Service conditions were fixed, as were the soldiers' legal status and rights. On honourable discharge each soldier was entitled either to a plot of land or a lump sum of money. This, along with the soldiers' pay, was funded by a special military treasury (*aerarium militare*) which was supervised, and often subsidised, by Augustus. The problem of veterans looking to their commanders to provide them with some form of livelihood was at long last averted, and Augustus also took care that the legionaries' loyalty was focused on him and no one else. The men were paid by the emperor, swore an oath of loyalty to him, and, when they performed any feat of gallantry, received medals awarded by him.

The Roman Empire depended on the power of its armies, which had always been composed of a combination of citizen and non-citizen troops. Before the universal

RIGHT The Louvre relief, now thought to be from the Arch of Claudius erected in AD51, has been the most influential of all images of the Praetorian Guard. The lower half of the right-hand figure, portions of the middle two, and the heads of all three figures in the foreground are modern restorations. The eagle in the background may be a form of Praetorian standard. (Photo by Leemage/Corbis via Getty Images)



extension of citizenship in AD212, citizens were recruited into the legions, while non-citizens traditionally entered the auxiliary units. Remarkably little is known about the process of recruitment: conscription was probably always a feature, with manpower needs being apportioned in line with census records of citizens, but there was also some element of hereditary service as units drew on veteran settlements. At times, perhaps often, military service offered a reasonably good and quite safe career for the young provincials, especially if they served close to home. More and more newly created citizens were employed in the Roman army, a situation which was to later highlight the weaknesses inherent in training your enemies to your fighting technique.

A SNAPSHOT OF THE PRAETORIAN GUARD AT THE TIME OF THE JULIO-CLAUDIANS

The Praetorian Guard has become a byword for military force that is used to prop up a ruthless regime. There is no doubt that they performed this function in the Roman Empire. As the main body of troops in Rome they were the emperor's instrument to discourage plotting and rebellion and to crush unrest. They were the emperor's most immediate line of defence; they could also, on occasion, be his most deadly enemies.

Comfortable and relatively safe in their barracks in Rome, enjoying shorter service and better pay and bonuses than any other unit in the Empire, and often involved in nothing more arduous than sentry-duty at the palace, the Praetorians were the envy of the legionaries stationed at the frontiers. All this might seem an unlikely background for an elite fighting unit, yet when the Guard did take the field, they appear to have been well enough trained and officered to acquit themselves well. Indeed, in the late first and second centuries, when emperors frequently campaigned in person and took the Guard with them, they proved efficient and loyal.

ORGANISATION

The great majority of the Praetorian Guard was infantry but, as with the legions, the Guard did include an attachment of cavalry. Inscriptions suggest that men could become cavalry (*equites*) after about five years' service as infantry. The Guard also had a special elite cavalry section, known as the *speculatores Augusti,* who formed the emperor's cavalry bodyguard. These men were apparently distinguished by a special form of boot of unknown form, the *caliga speculatoria,* and they received specific honorific bronze diplomas on discharge. The strength of this body of men is uncertain, but they had their own riding instructor and were commanded by a *centurio speculatorum*.

For the first century of the Principate, the Julio-Claudian emperors had a personal bodyguard of German troops operating alongside the Praetorians. Their origin lay in the period of the civil wars, when foreign mercenaries seem to have been regarded as more reliable than a guard of Roman citizens, whose loyalties might be divided. Unlike the Praetorians the Germans (*Germani corporis custodes*) were in effect a private force. Recruitment was direct from Germany and Gaul, and inscriptions show that the individuals did not become Roman citizens. The use of Germans, with their shaggy beards, immense size and renowned ferocity, was intended to discourage assassins.

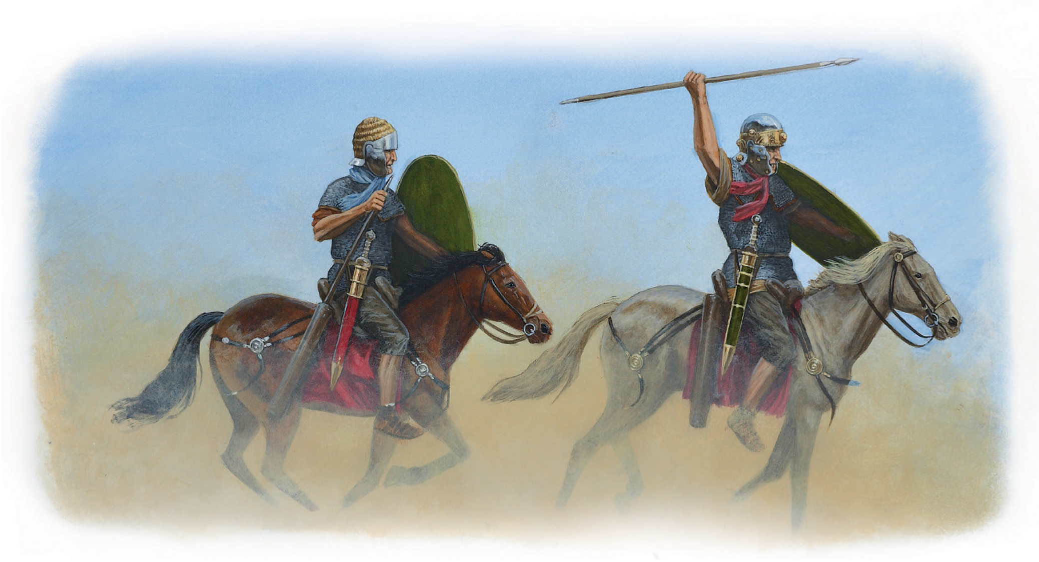
The Germans acted as infantry when on guard at the palace but as cavalry in the field, and were always closely associated with the Praetorians. They were, however, paramilitary rather than a genuine part of the Roman army.

UNIFORM AND EQUIPMENT

The appearance of the Praetorians undoubtedly changed somewhat throughout the course of their history, but some types of equipment have always been regarded as characteristic of the Guard, in particular the so-called 'Attic' helmet with bushy crest, and the oval shield. These appear in a famous relief now in the Louvre, Paris, which was once dated to the early second century, but is now recognised as coming from the Arch of Claudius erected in AD51. The combination of Attic helmet and oval shield has been thought of as imparting a consciously archaic look to the Praetorians – something akin to the red tunics and bearskins of the modern British Foot Guards – but recent research suggests that the Praetorians were simply equipped in a manner similar to their contemporaries in the legions. The *tunica* was the basic Roman male garment, worn by soldiers and civilians alike, although soldiers wore it short above the knee. It is frequently assumed that the soldier's tunic was usually red, but the available evidence suggests that the normal colour was white or off-white, the colour of undyed wool.

There is nothing to suggest that the rest of the Praetorians' arms and equipment differed from that of the legions. Trajan's Column, which depicts the story of Trajan's two Dacian wars, seems to make no distinction between Praetorian and legionary equipment, ascribing segmented armour to both, whilst following a convention of distinguishing auxiliaries by their use of mail shirts. Praetorians and legionaries are armed identically with javelin and a sword worn on the right side.

There were, nevertheless, certain items of dress and insignia which were peculiar to the Guard. Most distinctive of all, perhaps, was the civilian toga worn whilst on duty at the palace and in the Capitol in the first two centuries AD. The symbolism and political significance of this impractical form of dress is a feature apparently unique



to the Praetorians. Less out-of-the-ordinary is the special form of standard used by the Praetorians. Literary sources suggest that Praetorian standards had imperial portraits (*imagines*) attached to them, whereas the legions and auxiliaries seem for the most part to have had such *imagines* carried separately by special portrait-bearers (*imaginiferi*). Praetorian standards have therefore been identified on Trajan's Column and other reliefs from their display of such portraits along with military decorations – mainly different types of crowns. Praetorian standard-bearers, whilst they carry the small round shield and are otherwise equipped like legionary standard-bearers on the monuments, are nevertheless distinguished from them by wearing lion masks and pelts, as opposed to bearskins, over their helmets and down their backs.

ABOVE Here we see a Praetorian cavalryman of the early second century AD throwing javelins from horseback. Roman cavalry did not use stirrups but horned saddles, which provided a stable fighting platform. (Seán Ó'Brógáin © Osprey Publishing)

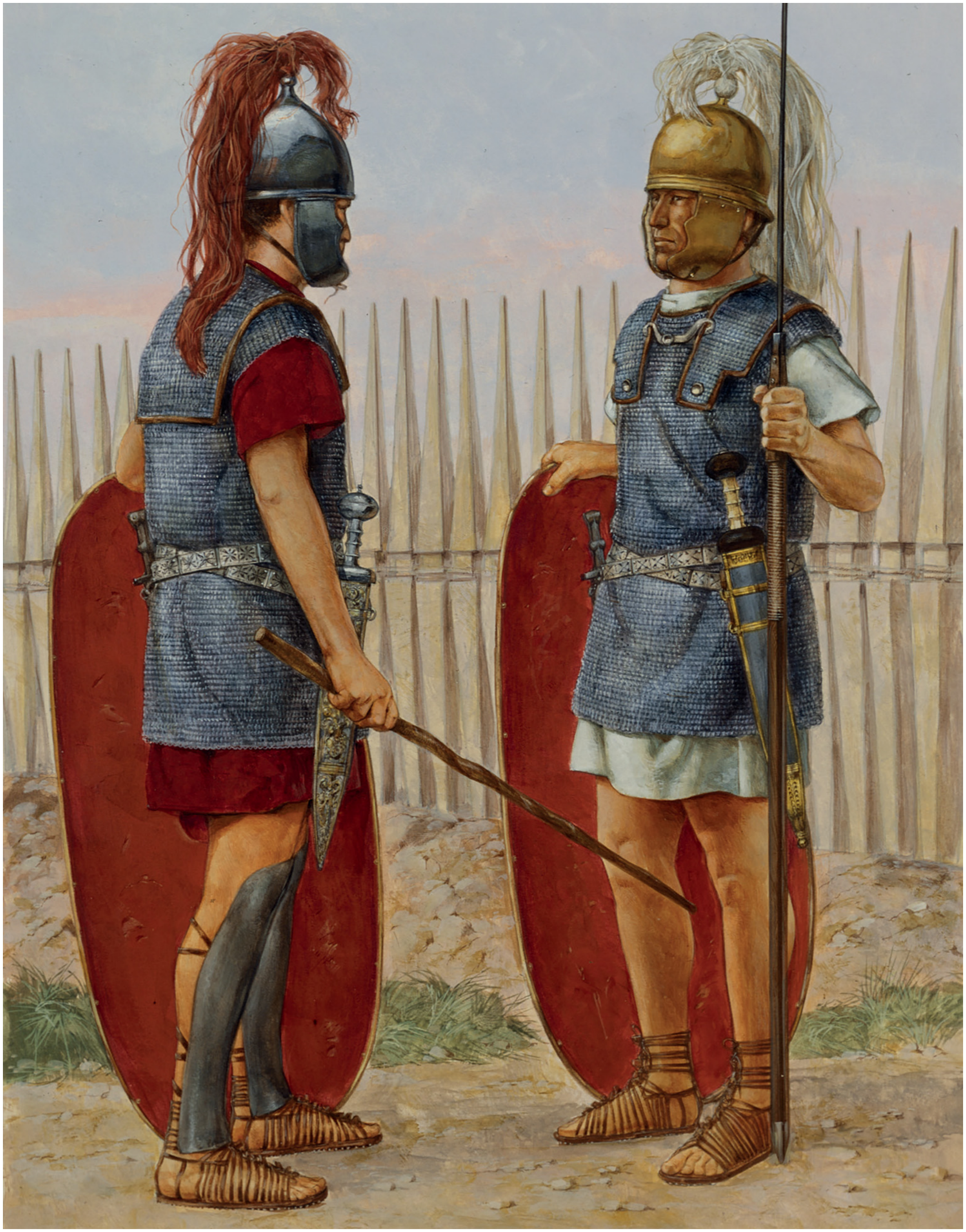
DUTIES

Until 2BC each Praetorian cohort was an independent unit under the separate command of a tribune of equestrian rank (i.e. a Roman knight). At that point Augustus appointed two senior Roman knights to take overall command as Praetorian Prefects. Whilst in Rome their principal duty was to mount guard at Augustus' home on the Palatine. Each afternoon, at the eighth hour, the tribune of the cohort on duty would receive the watchword from the emperor in person. After the construction of the Praetorian camp in AD23 there was a tribune on duty there, too. Other duties included escorting the emperor and other members of the imperial family and, if necessary, acting as a form of riot police. Again, to avoid antagonising the population of Rome and in accordance with Republican custom, the Praetorians did not wear armour when performing such duties within the city. Instead, they wore the rather formal toga, which would still make them conspicuous in a crowd but was a civilian garment and the mark of a Roman citizen. Even military displays were infrequent, and the troops appeared in armour in Rome only on very special occasions.

THE PRAETORIAN CAMP (*CASTRA PRAETORIA*)

The walls of the camp built for the Praetorians in AD23 can still be seen in Rome today. The remaining northern, eastern and southern walls stand on the Viminal

RIGHT This scene depicts a Praetorian centurion speaking with a young Praetorian guardsman inside the turf rampart and palisade of a temporary camp. The setting is the campaigns of Germanicus Caesar in Germany (AD14–16), and their equipment closely conforms to that of the figures on the late first century BC Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus and to that found in the archaeological record for the early part of the first century AD. (Richard Hook © Osprey Publishing)



THE GUARD AND THE JULIO-CLAUDIAN EMPERORS

AUGUSTUS (27BC–AD14)

After his victory over Antony, Octavian amalgamated his own force with those of his opponent in a symbolic reunification of Julius Caesar's army. With his own Praetorians and those of Antony, Octavian already had the administrative basis for a permanent Praetorian Guard. We know from Suetonius that Augustus, as he was then, was careful to have only three cohorts based in Rome itself, and these were not in a camp but billeted around the city; the others were scattered round the towns of Italy. It is clear that Augustus was extremely wary of flaunting too blatantly the basis of his power.

TIBERIUS (14–37)

The Guard took the field in earnest for the first time in AD14, as Augustus' successor Tiberius faced mutinies amongst both the Rhine and the Pannonian armies, who were complaining about their conditions of service, especially in comparison with those of the Praetorians.

The Pannonian forces were dealt with by Tiberius' young brother Drusus, accompanied by two Praetorian cohorts, Praetorian cavalry and the German bodyguard. The Rhine mutiny was put down by Tiberius' nephew and intended heir Germanicus, who then led the legions and detachments of the Guard in an invasion of Germany which continued over the next two years.

CALIGULA (37–41)

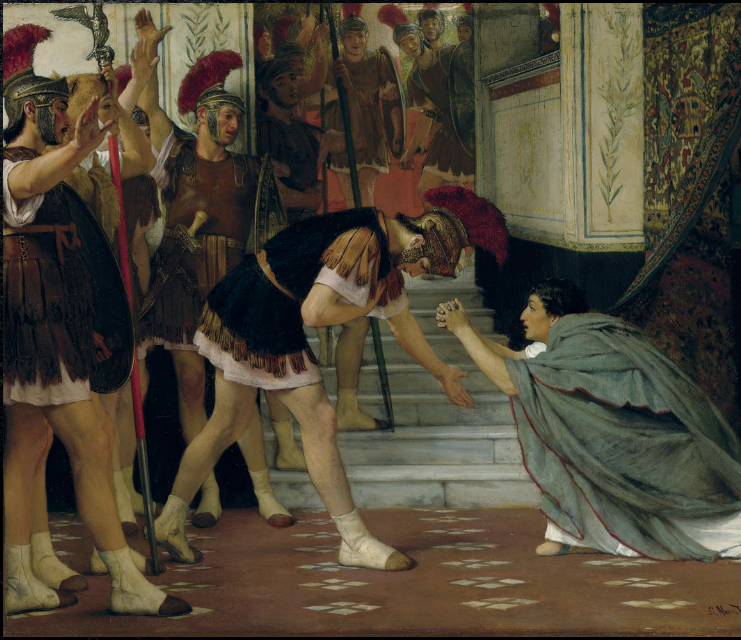
Tiberius' successor was Gaius Caligula, who came to the throne with the aid of the Praetorian Prefect Quintus Sutorius Marco. Caligula's follies supposedly included leading the Guard in triumph on a bridge of boats spanning the Bay of Naples, and taking the Praetorian cavalry on a farcical raid across the Rhine. In AD41 it was the sheer disgust and hostility that he had engendered in a tough Praetorian tribune by the name of Cassius Charea – whom Caligula teased mercilessly about his squeaky voice – which led to Caligula's assassination by officers of the Guard. The German bodyguard went on the rampage searching for the murderers, whilst the Senate deliberated on the restoration of a Republic.

CLAUDIUS (41–54)

While the Praetorians were looting the palace in the confusion after Caligula's death, they came across Caligula's uncle Claudius hiding behind a curtain. In need of an emperor to justify their own existence, they took Claudius off to the Praetorian camp and proclaimed his accession. The Senate was forced to accede to this coup: the Praetorians' first attempt at king-making had succeeded. Claudius rewarded the Guard with an unsurprising but generous bonus of five years' salary.

NERO (54–68AD)

When Claudius was poisoned by his wife Agrippina and stepson Nero, the Guard were not slow to transfer their allegiance and ensure the latter's accession. However, the mounting catalogue of Nero's crimes, which included matricide, again provoked a revulsion among the conservative officers of the Guard, and a number of them were involved in the dangerous Pisonian conspiracy of AD65. Another Praetorian Prefect took the lead in the suppression of the conspiracy, and the Guard was rewarded with a bonus of 500 *denarii* per man.



Proclaiming Claudius emperor. Painting by Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, 1867, now in a private collection. (Photo by Fine Art images/Heritage Images/Getty Images)

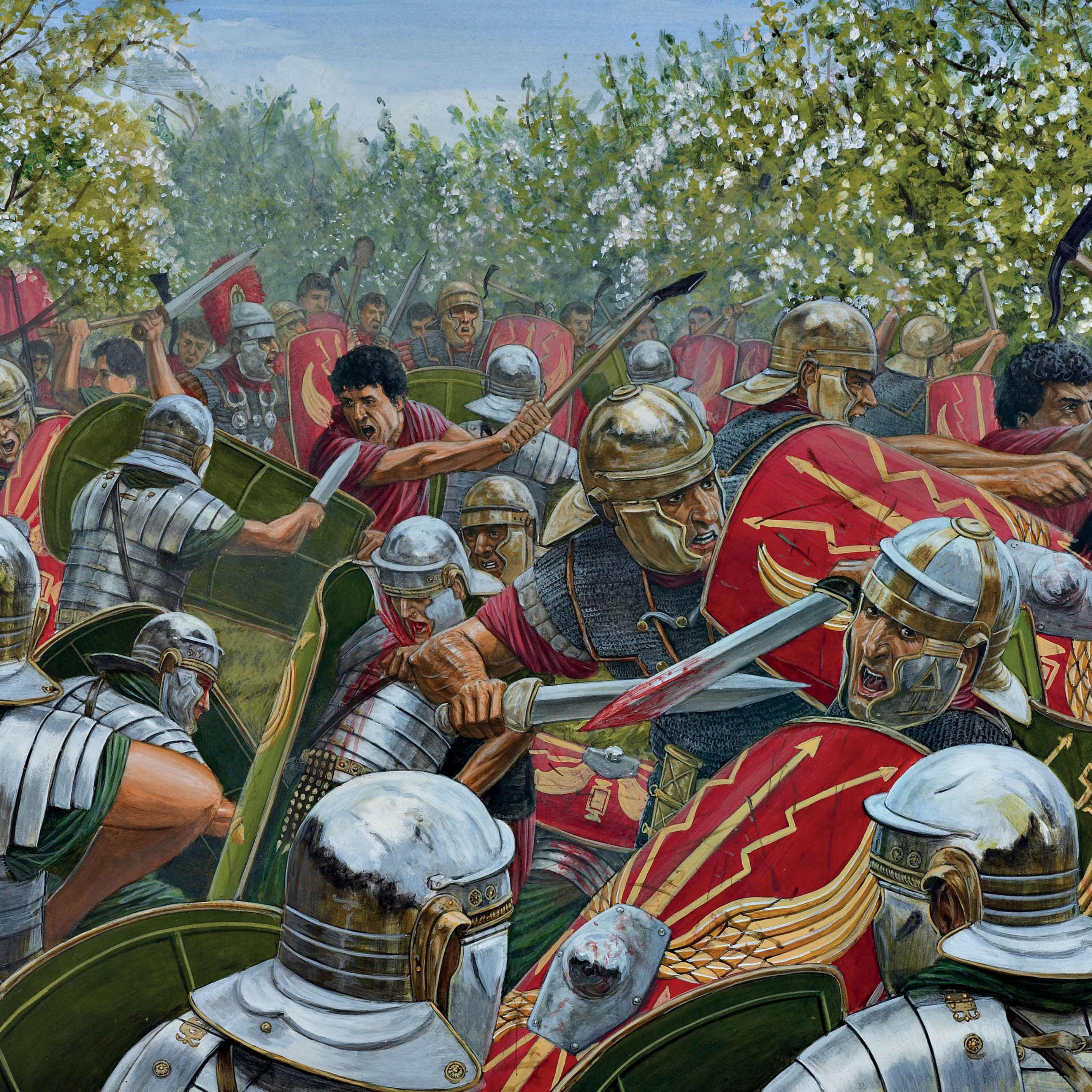
Hill, where they house the modern-day garrison of Rome. They enclose an area of just over 17 hectares, about two-thirds the size of the average legionary fortress on the frontiers. This suggests a capacity of something like 4,000 men, but the few internal buildings which can be traced include extra rooms ranged around the inside of the walls and traces of two-storey barracks, so a true capacity of 12,000 men or more may therefore not be fanciful.

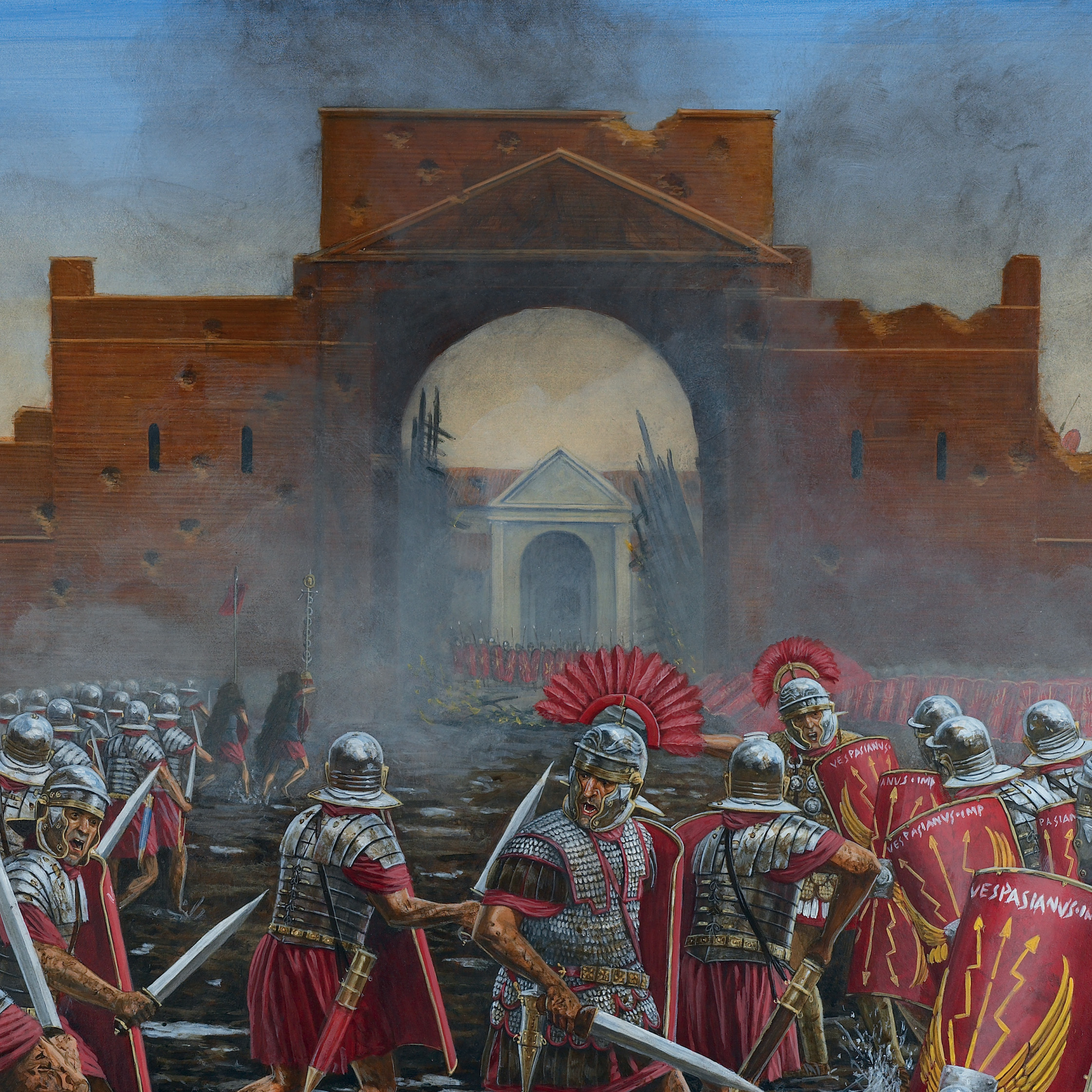
SERVICE IN THE PRAETORIAN COHORTS

Service in the Praetorian Guard was in many ways an attractive proposition, offering a shorter period of service and better pay than the legions, together with the perks and advantages of living in Rome, and less frequent exposure to danger and discomfort. We know from inscriptions that men were recruited between the ages of 15 and 32, a rather broader spread than for legionary recruitment, which was usually between 17 and 23.

Most Praetorian Guards were recruited from central and northern Italy, and also from Spain and Macedonia in the first two centuries AD. This means the Guard was drawn from the most prosperous and Romanised parts of the Empire. When Septimius Severus came to power, however, he dismissed the unruly Praetorians who had tried to buy and sell the Empire in 193, and replaced them with men from his own Danubian legions. After this, Italians were no longer recruited at all; instead it

RIGHT Legionaries of the armies of Vitellius and Otho, engaging at close quarters near Cremona, in the 'Year of the Four Emperors', AD69. The nature of the terrain meant that some parts of the battle were fought among vineyards and fruit trees. Vitellius' troops prevailed, and he went on to succeed Otho as Emperor. (Seán Ó'Brógáin © Osprey Publishing)

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was mostly men from the less Romanised Danube region who served in the Guard, after four to nine years' service in the legions.

From 5BC onwards, Praetorians signed up for 16 years' service, compared to the 25 years demanded in the legions. In 27BC, Augustus established the pay of Praetorians as double that of legionaries. By AD14 they were receiving 720 *denarii* per year, three times the 225 of the legionaries; this differential is likely to have remained constant throughout the history of the Guard. Claudius gave the Guard five years' salary at his accession, becoming the first emperor to buy their loyalty in this way, according to Suetonius. Most emperors followed suit to a greater or lesser extent, while at the same time the legions often got nothing. Such slender evidence as exists also suggests that Praetorians were more likely to be decorated for courage in battle than legionaries. On retirement they received proportionally larger discharge bonuses, 5,000 as opposed to 3,000 *denarii* and, unlike legionaries, they were presented with honorific diplomas on bronze which made legitimate their first marriages and the children born of them. The huge discrepancy in the treatment of Praetorians and of legionaries was obviously the result of their constant presence in Rome, and their ability to create and destroy emperors.

In order to be accepted into the Guard and reap these rewards, a man would need to be physically fit, of good character and respectable family. He would also have

LEFT In December of AD69, the Flavian army captured Rome. The toughest fighting was at the *Castra Praetoria*, held by Vitellian Praetorian cohorts, and the assault was led by former Othonians. Here the attackers are shown equipped as regular legionaries; when disbanded by Vitellius, they had had to hand in their arms and equipment. The Vitellian Praetorians can be seen in the courtyard behind the gates. (Seán Ó'Brógáin © Osprey Publishing) to make use of all the patronage available, by obtaining letters of recommendation from any men of importance he knew. If he passed the induction procedure and became *probates*, he would be assigned as a *miles* to one of the centuries of a cohort. After a few years, providing he could gain the attention of his officers by influence or merit, he might obtain a post as an *immunis*, perhaps as a headquarters clerk or a technician, any of which would free him from normal fatigues. A few more years' service might advance him to *principalis*, with double pay, in charge of passing on the watchword (*tesserarius*) or as a centurion's deputy (*optio*) or standard-bearer (*signifer*) in the century; or, if highly literate and numerate, he might be appointed to the Prefect's staff.

Only a small number of soldiers would achieve the grade of *principalis* but those who did might, on completion of their service, be appointed *evocati Augusti* by the emperor. This appointment enabled them to take up administrative, technical or instructor posts in Rome, or a centurionate in a legion, and so extend their careers. Alternatively, some *principales* might before the end of their service be advanced to the rank of centurion in the Guard. The centurionate was enormously prestigious and well paid and we know that some Roman knights gave up their equestrian status in order to obtain a direct commission to this rank. For the man who had risen to this position it would probably be the culmination of his career, and although there was no restriction on the length of service, he would probably retire in it. Anyone who wished to climb further up the ladder would have to transfer to a legion, and very few would be able to do this.

THE AUCTION OF THE EMPIRE

In AD193 the Praetorian Guard murdered the emperor Pertinax when he tried to discipline them following a small mutiny. There was no formally agreed successor to replace Pertinax, which led to one of the most unusual events in the history of Rome. The father-in-law of Pertinax, Flavius Sulpicianus, was a prefect of the city, and he went to the camp to try to persuade the guard to accept him as a successor. He was an unpopular choice amongst the Praetorian Guard, but they could not find a suitable alternative, even after they had searched the streets of Rome for a contender. It was then that Didius Julianus, a rich senator in the midst of a late-night drinking session, heard of what was taking place, and went to the walls of the camp. Once there he shouted to the Guard that he would offer them as much money, gold and silver as they wanted in return for the emperorship. An impromptu 'auction' began between Didius Julianus and Flavius Sulpicianus, which was eventually won by Didius Julianus for a price of 25,000 *sesterces* per guard. The Empire was sold and Didius Julianus was proclaimed emperor. Inevitably, Didius Julianus was not a popular choice amongst the citizens of Rome, who saw his climb to power as risible. Didius Julianus did not get much for his money, since he was emperor for only two months – his reign reached an untimely end when he was beheaded during Septimius Severus' conquest of Rome.

IMP CAES P HELV PERTINAX AVG

A rare coin struck in the reign of Emperor Pertinax, who held power for just three months in AD193, 'the Year of the Five Emperors'. (Photo by Hoberman Collection/UIG via Getty Images

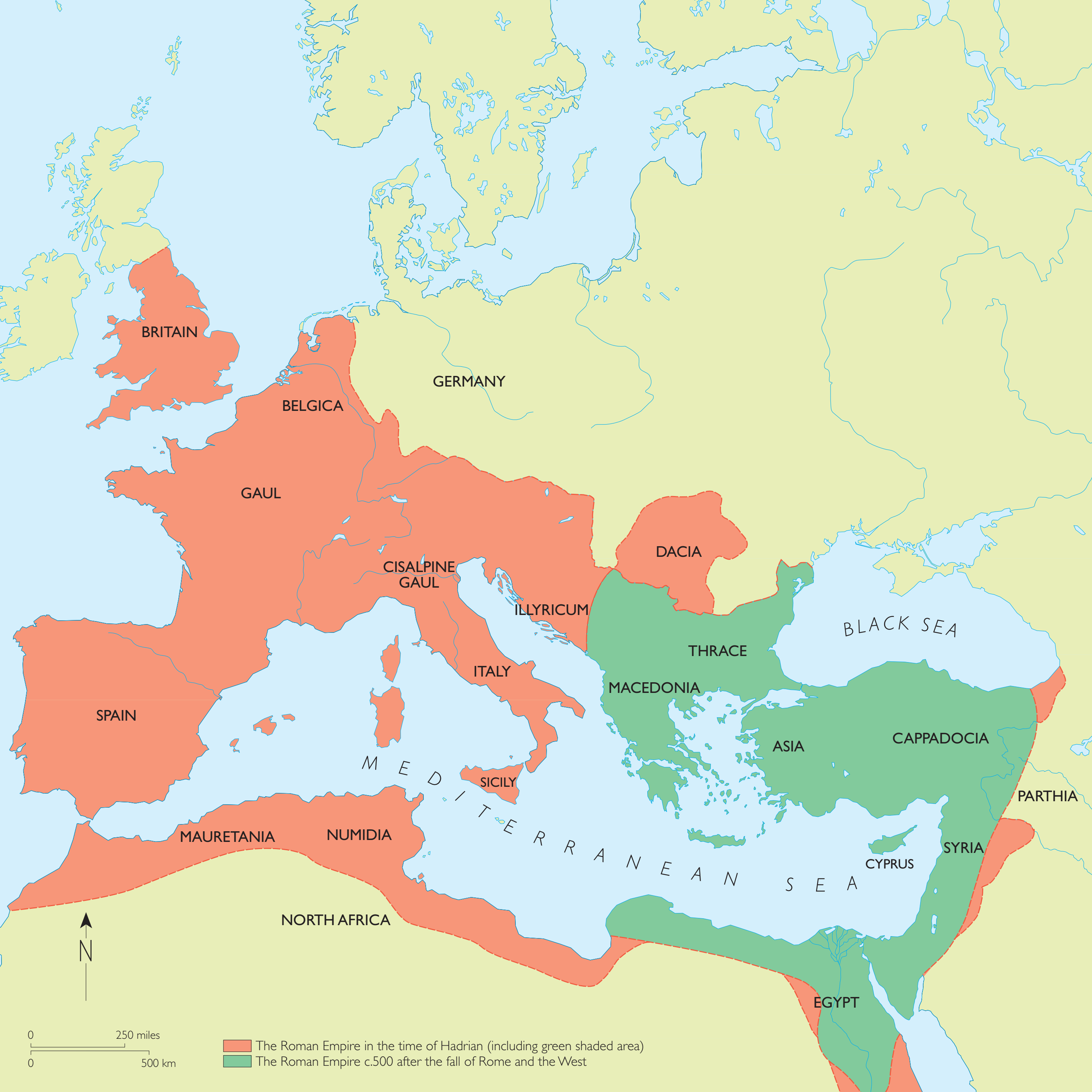
THE LATE EMPIRE AD235–500

The Empire of Rome must, for a while, have seemed immortal, its armies conquering and defending ever-increasing swathes of land. But small cracks had become serious flaws in Rome's foundations, and the emergence of stronger warriors pushing at her frontiers was about to topple this once-mighty tower of strength...

CRISIS, CHRISTIANITY AND CIVIL WAR

In the early third century AD the Roman Empire stretched from Scotland to the Sahara and the northern end of the river Tigris – an enormous imperial enterprise and the most powerful state in the world. Four centuries later the Empire had shrunk to consist of Anatolia, the Aegean fringes of the Balkans, and limited territories in Italy

LEFT A scene from Trajan's Column showing the triumph of the emperor after the first campaign against the Dacians. (Photo by Independent Picture Service/UIG via Getty Images)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ASIA
CAPPADOCIA
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
SICILY
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MAURETANIA
NUMIDIA
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CYPRUS
NORTH AFRICA
N
EGYPT
0
250 miles
0
500 km
🟥 The Roman Empire in the time of Hadrian (including green shaded area)
🟩 The Roman Empire c.500 after the fall of Rome and the West

around Rome and Ravenna. Diminishing imperial authority, undermining the fiscal and military structures that permitted the imperial machine to function, had fatally weakened the Roman Empire, making it unable to effectively resist the pressure on its western frontiers, eventually leading to the emergence and conquests of stronger peoples.

Overall, the Empire was prosperous during the first two centuries AD, as can be seen from the archaeological remains of provincial cities where local elites competed to beautify their home towns. On the other hand, there were already ominous signs of strain in the second century, the golden age of imperial prosperity. Prolonged warfare was expensive, especially along the European river frontiers where booty was unlikely to offset costs: troops had to be moved to the area of conflict, imposing demands on communities along their lines of march, and extra resources were demanded to make good losses.

After the emperor Severus Alexander was murdered by his own troops in 235, the Roman Empire experienced 50 years of instability, commonly termed the Third-century Crisis. Between 235 and 284, the Empire saw at least 23 different emperors attempting to impose rule. Each new emperor meant another donation to the troops; each civil war meant more loss of life, physical destruction and distraction from the frontiers.

These problems were compounded by events on the Danube, where the Romans had to face a new enemy. Here change had been slow, the result of the gradual movement of Gothic peoples from northern Poland. The first attested Gothic incursion came in 238, when they sacked Istria near the Danube mouth; a decade later they swept across the north-eastern Balkans, and Emperor Decius was killed and his army annihilated while trying to force the Goths back across the Danube in 251.

This great movement of Goths naturally displaced other peoples who might find themselves squeezed against the Roman frontier; this process could trigger the formation of substantial federations as different tribes steeled themselves for the ultimate challenge of attacking the Romans. On the upper Danube the Vandals, Quadi and Marcomanni breached the frontier, and on the upper Rhine the Alamanni increased their strength to the extent that they twice invaded Italy in the 260s. On the lower Rhine the Franks gradually came to dominate another large federation that threatened frontier defences during the latter half of the century.

Of the Roman world, only Africa, the Iberian peninsula and, to a lesser extent, Britain, were spared invasion. The cumulative nature of the frontier pressure is evident, with emperors unable to divert troops from one sector to another and instead constrained to confront invaders in conditions that led to defeat. The consequences for imperial prestige are obvious, and in the late 260s the Empire was virtually split into three units, which attended separately to their own security. The Empire was only reunited by Aurelian in a series of energetic campaigns, which were helped by instability in Gaul. Also, Aurelian was prepared to abandon the exposed province of Dacia, and redeploy Roman troops along the lower Danube.

ABOVE This coin marks the joint reign of Diocletian and Maximian from AD286 to 305. (© R. Sheridan/ AAA Collection Ltd)

Prolonged warfare inside the frontiers, regular defeat and the rapid turnover of emperors cumulatively had a major impact on the strength of the Empire, and were to play a key part in subsequent events that led to the Empire's collapse.

Diocletian came to power in 284, and during his 20-year reign he re-established imperial stability, before his planned retirement. The secret of his success was an imperial college, since one factor promoting earlier disunity had been the desire of major armies to have their own emperor. Diocletian elevated a long-standing colleague, Maximian, to the rank of Caesar in 285, and despatched him to Gaul to quell an uprising. In 286 Maximian was promoted to Augustus. After six years of joint reign, rebellion in Egypt prompted Diocletian to increase his imperial resources by appointing two junior colleagues as Caesars, Galerius for the east and Constantius for the west. Marriage between the Caesars and daughters of the Augusti united the Tetrarchy. Diocletian's administrative overhaul doubled the number of provinces, and reformed the tax system to distribute the burden of land and poll tax more fairly.

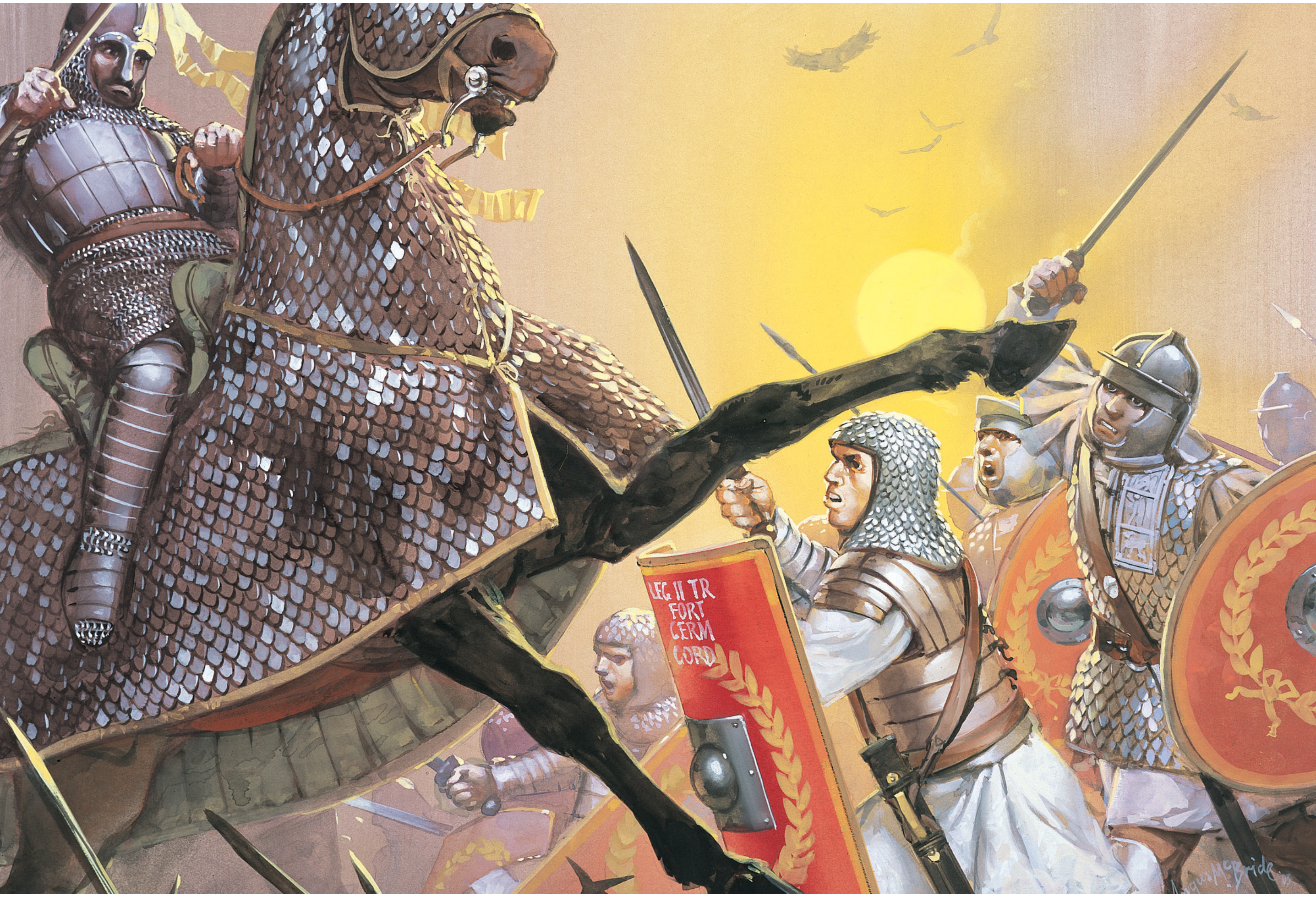
Diocletian retired in 305, to a specially prepared palace at Spalato (Split), but his succession arrangements faltered because they disregarded the soldiers' strong dynastic loyalties: when Constantius, the new Augustus of the west, died at York in 306, his troops promptly acclaimed his son, Constantine. Over the next six years Constantine schemed and fought his way to mastery of the whole western Empire, a process which culminated outside Rome at the battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312: his opponent, Maxentius, son of Diocletian's partner Maximian, deployed his troops on the north bank of the Tiber, but they were routed and during the confused flight back to the city the wooden bridge collapsed. The most significant aspect of Constantine's victory was that his men fought under the sign of Christ, whose inspiration Constantine proclaimed. Lactantius and Eusebius, writing in the fourth century AD, claim that Constantine prayed the night before the battle, but that he was unsure of the god to whom his prayers were directed until a sign was sent to him in the sky. This sign was the chi rho, under which symbol Constantine's troops went into battle the next day. After the battle he set about rewarding his new God. Constantine's conversion eventually led to the Christianisation of the Empire and so of Europe.

For the next 12 years Constantine shared the Empire in an uneasy partnership with Licinius in the east, but in 324 the two clashed in a decisive naval engagement in the Bosphorus, with Constantine emerging as sole ruler of the whole Empire. This victory was marked by the construction of a new capital – Constantinople – on the site of the old city of Byzantium, which gained new walls, a palace, and other appurtenances of an imperial seat. Constantine now inherited responsibility for the Danube and Persian frontiers. During the 330s he campaigned energetically against the Goths, to such effect that the area was quiet for the next generation. Towards the end of his reign tension began to rise in the east, and Constantine bequeathed the conflict to his successors, since he died near Nicomedia in 337 at the start of the march east.

The Empire was divided between Constantine's three surviving sons, Constantine II in Gaul, Constans in Rome, and Constantius II in the east inheriting the war against the Sassanid Persian Shapur. Civil war erupted, and once again legion fought legion until Julian, the half-brother of Constantine I (who had been sent to

RIGHT Constantine was an extremely important emperor in terms of the history of the Roman Empire, introducing, as he did, Christianity to the Empire, and establishing a second capital, or 'New Rome' at Byzantium. This 'New Rome' was to survive when the original Rome fell. The statue is at York Cathedral, England. (Warwick Kent/Getty Images)

CONSTANTINE, BY THIS SIGN CONQUER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CORD
Angus McBride

Gaul in 355 because internal conflict had permitted Franks and Alamanni to breach the frontier), was acclaimed Augustus at Paris in February 360. After his death in Persia, Julian was succeeded by his general Jovian, and then the brothers Valentinian and Valens shared the Empire, with the senior Valentinian taking charge of the Rhine and Upper Danube, and Valens responsible for the Lower Danube and east. Valens was killed by Goths in the massive Roman defeat at Adrianople, and succeeded by Theodosius, who in 382 settled the Goths in the Balkans as federates.

In 395 Theodosius defeated his usurpers to reunify the Empire, and become the sole leader of Rome, but he was to be the last to do so. In 395 he was succeeded by the young Honorius, but the west was controlled by Stilicho, a general of Vandal descent. Under Stilicho, Alaric the Goth built up an army which, in 410, sacked Rome, and brought fatal weakness to the Western Empire.

FIGHTING AT THE FRONTIERS

This late imperial period saw the Romans pitted against enemies in three main sectors: along the Rhine against the Alamanni, Franks and other Germanic tribes; on the Danube against the Sarmatians and Goths, then the Hunnic tribes; in Armenia and Mesopotamia against the Sassanid Persians.

LEFT In AD283–9 the Sassanid Persians overran the Roman province of Mesopotamia. In AD243, the Roman field army won a victory over the Persians at the Rhesaina. Depicted here are legionaries of Legio II Traiana, turning to attack the pursuing cavalry which they have lured onto hidden spikes and caltrops by feigning retreat. (Angus McBride © Osprey Publishing)

THE EASTERN FRONTIER

In 226, beyond the eastern frontier, the Sassanid Ardashir was crowned in Ctesiphon, the old Parthian capital, the Sassanids having finally defeated and overrun the Parthians. The change was significant since the Romans had generally dominated the Parthians, and indeed repeated Roman successes had contributed to undermining royal prestige, but the Sassanids propagated a dynamic nationalism, including links with the Achaemenids, who had ruled Persia before Alexander the Great's conquests. Embassies demanded the return of their ancestral property, with war as the consequence of the inevitable refusal. Ardashir's son, Shapur, invaded the eastern provinces of the Empire in 253 and 260, capturing the major city of Antioch. The Emperor Valerian was captured in battle at Edessa (Urfa) in 260 and taken back to Persia. For the next decade, imperial authority in the east was limited. The east had become an expensive military arena for the Romans, and the substantial tax revenues of its provinces were jeopardised.

Constantius II pursued a dogged 24 years of war against the Sassanid Persians, managing to preserve the eastern frontier with only limited losses in the face of one of the most dynamic Persian rulers, Shapur. Constantius' strategy was to build new forts and rely on the major cities of the frontier to hold up Persian incursions.

Julian inherited the Empire of the east after the death of Constantius in 361, with a reputation as a successful general and a need to demonstrate that he could surpass Constantius. A major factor in this was religion: Julian espoused the old gods and had renounced formal adherence to Christianity. Persia offered the greatest testing ground, where Julian could prove the rectitude of his beliefs and the pusillanimity of Constantius' policies. A planned grand invasion in 363 began well, with Julian overrunning Persian forts along the Euphrates and reaching the vicinity of the capital

Ctesiphon; however, treacherous guides led Julian astray, and then Shapur, whose army had not been tied down effectively in the north, began to harass him. Julian was mortally wounded in a skirmish and his successor, the officer Jovian, could only extract his armies by surrendering territories to the east of the Tigris, plus Nisibis and Singara. Although the loss of Nisibis rankled, Jovian's agreement of 363 ushered in the most prolonged period of peace which the Roman eastern frontier had ever experienced, a fact crucial to the eastern Empire's survival in the fifth century. There were moments of tension, and two brief conflicts, but no prolonged warfare until 502. Hunnic activity in the Balkans, and Persian distractions on the north-eastern frontier, kept the two sides away from prolonged and costly war with each other.

THE WESTERN FRONTIER: DANUBE

Slow change came about along the Danube frontier throughout the third century, as the Gothic peoples began gradually to migrate from northern Poland. The first attested Gothic incursion came in 238, when they sacked Istria near the Danube mouth; a decade later they swept across the north-east Balkans, and Emperor Decius was killed and his army annihilated while trying to force them back across the Danube in 251.

This great movement of Goths naturally displaced other peoples who might find themselves squeezed against the Roman frontier; this process could trigger the formation of substantial federations as different tribes steeled themselves for the ultimate challenge of attacking the Romans. On the upper Danube, the Vandals, Quadi and Marcomanni breached the frontier.

Stability was brought briefly to the frontier under Constantine, which held under Julian and for a while under Valens, but when Gratian, of limited military experience, succeeded Valentinian in 367, masses of Goths arrived on the lower Danube frontier, to pester Roman officials for the right to cross and settle peacefully.

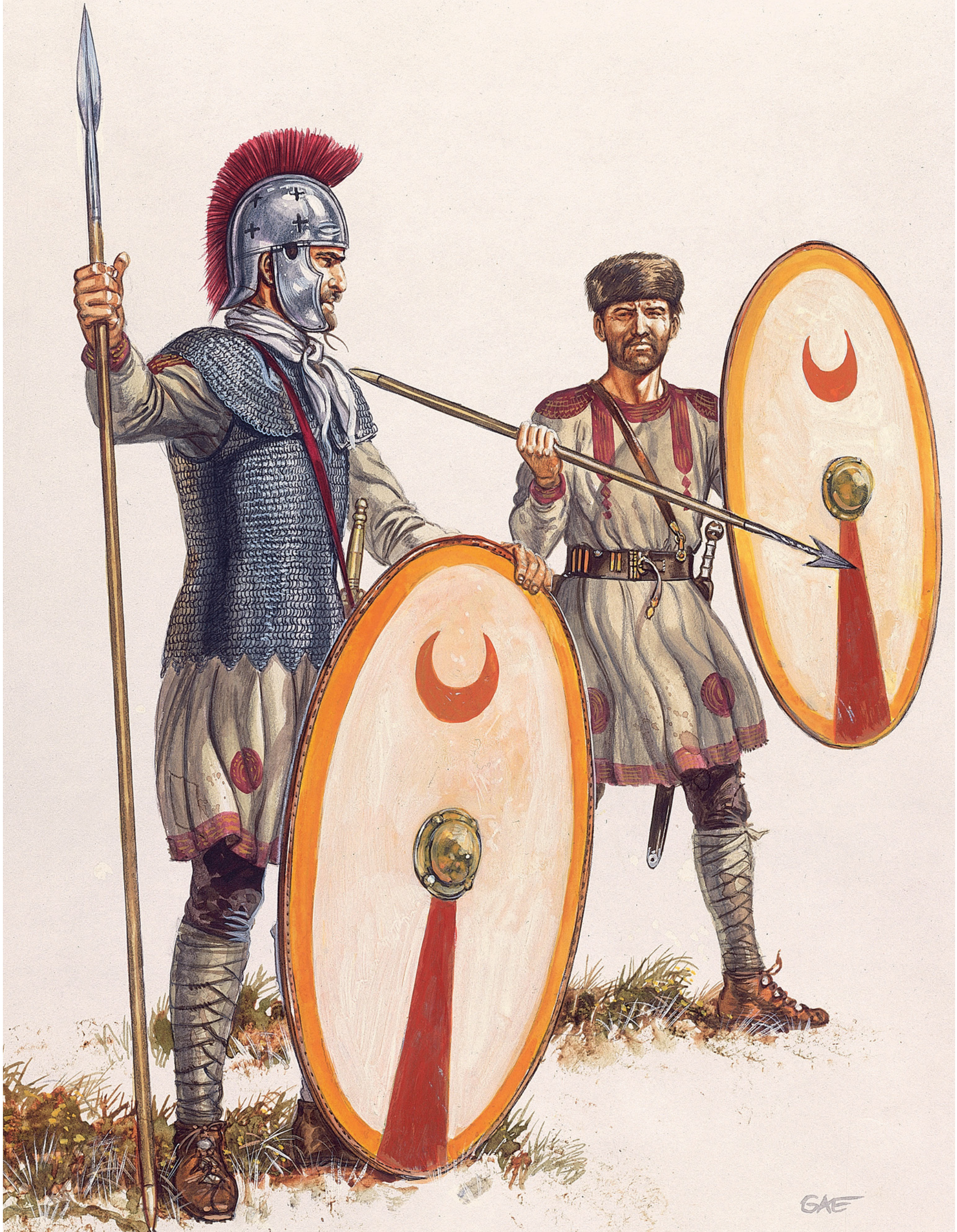
Their desperation was caused by the westward movement of the Huns, who had been displaced from further east and were now approaching the Black Sea with a consequent domino effect on the tribes there. After initial failure, the Romans managed to contain the Gothic threat by exploiting control of food and by harassing the Goths as soon as they dispersed to seek supplies. In 378, two-thirds of the Roman army, including the emperor of the east, Valens, were killed by Goths at the battle of Adrianople. The rise of the Goths was to blur the division between the frontiers of the Danube and Rhine, as both were decisively and fatally breached.

THE WESTERN FRONTIER: RHINE

The Rhine provided a partial barrier to tribal movement that the Romans could control through naval squadrons and by supervising recognised crossing-points. On the upper Rhine the Alamanni increased their strength to the extent that they twice invaded Italy in the 260s. On the lower Rhine the Franks gradually came to dominate another large federation that threatened frontier defences during the latter half of the century, and Saxon pirates began to raid across the North Sea and down the channel.

During 356 Julian campaigned energetically and re-established Roman authority along the Rhine, but in August 357, Julian confronted the Alamanni on the right

RIGHT The *auxilia palatina* were infantry that formed the most important part of fourth century armies, particularly in the west. The figure on the right is in heavy equipment, suited for fighting in the line of battle, and on the left in light equipment, suitable for a patrol or foraging expedition. (Gerry Embleton)


GAE

THE REASONS FOR ROMAN DEFEAT AT ADRIANOPLE

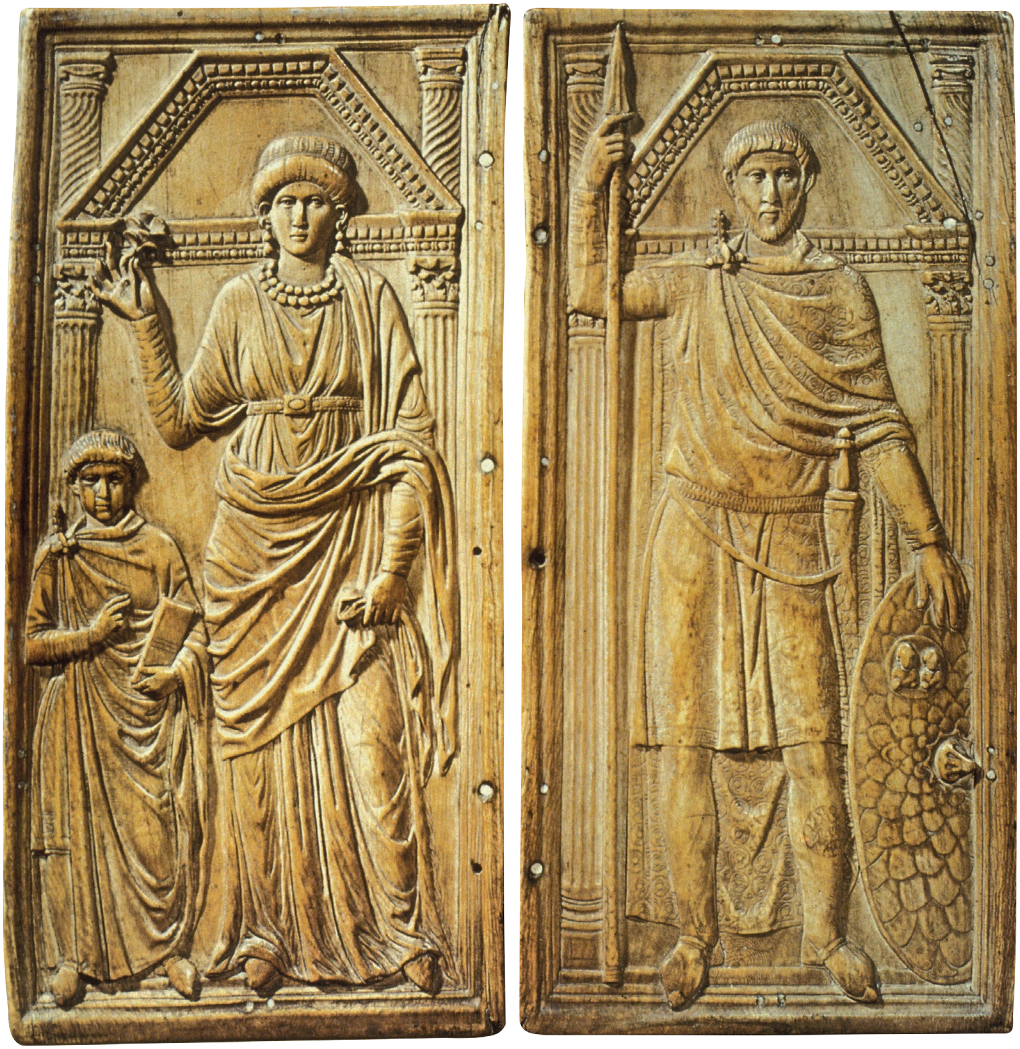
In AD378, after years of clashes with the Goths led by Fritigern, the emperor Valens decided to bring the opposing army to a decisive battle. In August of 378, his army reached the town of Adrianople, where the fateful battle took place. How was it that the best organised, equipped and disciplined army in the world could have been so thoroughly defeated by what amounted to an *ad hoc* force of refugees and deserters? Various explanations have been offered over the years to explain away the improbable. Some claim that the Goths had a huge numerical superiority, quoting numbers as high as 200,000 when in fact they would have been lucky to have a tenth of that number. Others put it down to a tactical superiority of cavalry over infantry, when actually the battle was a classic infantry versus infantry clash with a timely cavalry charge swinging the balance.

The Romans lost the Adrianople campaign for a number of fairly mundane strategic as well as tactical reasons. At the strategic level, because of the constant threats along the frontiers, the Romans were simply unable to draw together enough high-quality troops to deal quickly and decisively with the Gothic threat. Furthermore, all the Roman commanders, with the possible exception of Sebastian, acted with the typical arrogance of a well-equipped 'civilised' army dealing with what they saw as a rabble. They allowed themselves to be drawn into battle without proper preparation or reconnaissance and without ensuring that the odds were stacked in their favour before committing to a fight.

Finally, it is quite probable that the quality and morale of the east Roman army was low before the campaign even began. Only 13 years earlier they had suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Persians and the army had probably not fully recovered. Furthermore, like society, the army was torn apart by religious controversy as pagans, Arian Christians and Catholic Christians fought and persecuted each other. It has been speculated that some of the cavalry, under the influence of Victor, the Catholic *magister equitum*, may have deliberately deserted Valens, who was an Arian. The Roman failings must also be matched against the strategic skill shown by Fritigern, who despite horrendous logistical problems, managed to dictate the terms and tempo of the campaign throughout. At the tactical level the Gothic victory was won by relatively fresh troops fighting hot, tired and thirsty men who were surprised by the unexpected appearance of enemy reinforcements. The Roman cavalry performed poorly and showed an alarming lack of discipline. They were easily driven off, some deserting without a fight. Without cavalry support, the Roman infantry were hit in the flank while engaged to their front and despite some stubborn resistance by several units, the result was inevitable.

bank of the Rhine near Argentoratum (Strasbourg): it was a hard-fought struggle. Superior Roman discipline and training overcame the Alamanni's advantage in physical size, and the battle was won by the Roman infantry, whereas the Roman cavalry was forced to flee. The Goths were weakened by casualties during the reign of Theodosius, but when control of the western Empire was assumed by Stilicho, the Goths seized upon the Empire being split again to demand a better deal.

Alaric, a Gothic commander under the Emperor Theodosius, emerged as leader of a force capable of withstanding an imperial army, but still struggled to secure lasting benefits for the Goths. His success only came after other tribal groups breached the western defences. On 31 December 406, Vandals, Alans and Suevi swarmed across the Rhine, triggering the proclamation of local commanders as emperors. Stilicho's authority crumbled and his family was eliminated; with it disappeared the main Roman army in northern Italy, since many of Stilicho's Gothic troops chose to join Alaric. Alaric failed to obtain concessions from Honorius, established his own emperor, and on 24 August 410 captured Rome. This brief sack of Rome was of symbolic significance; of greater importance were Honorius' imperial rivals in Gaul and Spain, whose ambitions permitted the invading tribes to exploit Roman divisions. Inevitably local protectors appeared who had to exploit the available military manpower, which was often roaming tribal bands; incompatible objectives emerged, with the policy of crushing invaders at odds with a desire to preserve their manpower for future use.



Alaric died whilst trying to reach Africa, and his followers, whom it is now convenient to call Visigoths (west Goths), moved to Spain, where they helped to subdue the Suevi and Vandals. One consequence of Visigothic involvement in Spain was the Vandal crossing to Africa, although the precise cause was, naturally, internal Roman conflict. The Vandals' arrival in Africa in 429 condemned the western Empire: within a decade they had taken over the north African provinces, captured Carthage (in 439) and withstood eastern Empire attempts to repulse them. The loss of North Africa decisively reduced the resources on which emperors could call, and to compound the problem the Vandals used Roman ships at Carthage to dominate Sicily and Sardinia and to ravage Italy.

They sacked Rome in 455, a much more destructive event than Alaric's entry in 410. From the Roman perspective the priorities now were to restore battered imperial authority, stabilise the tribal groups, and gradually weaken their independence. However, continuing conflict between emperors within the Empire meant that Roman strength could not be secured enough to allow any of this to happen, and a Roman dispute in 425 brought the Huns into western Empire affairs. Attila the Hun's attempted invasion in 451 was repulsed by the Roman Aetius at the battle of the Catalaunian Plains, but when Attila turned to northern Italy in 452, Aetius could not prevent the loss of many northern cities. Eventually Pope Leo had to be deployed to encourage Attila to leave. In September 454, Valentinian assassinated

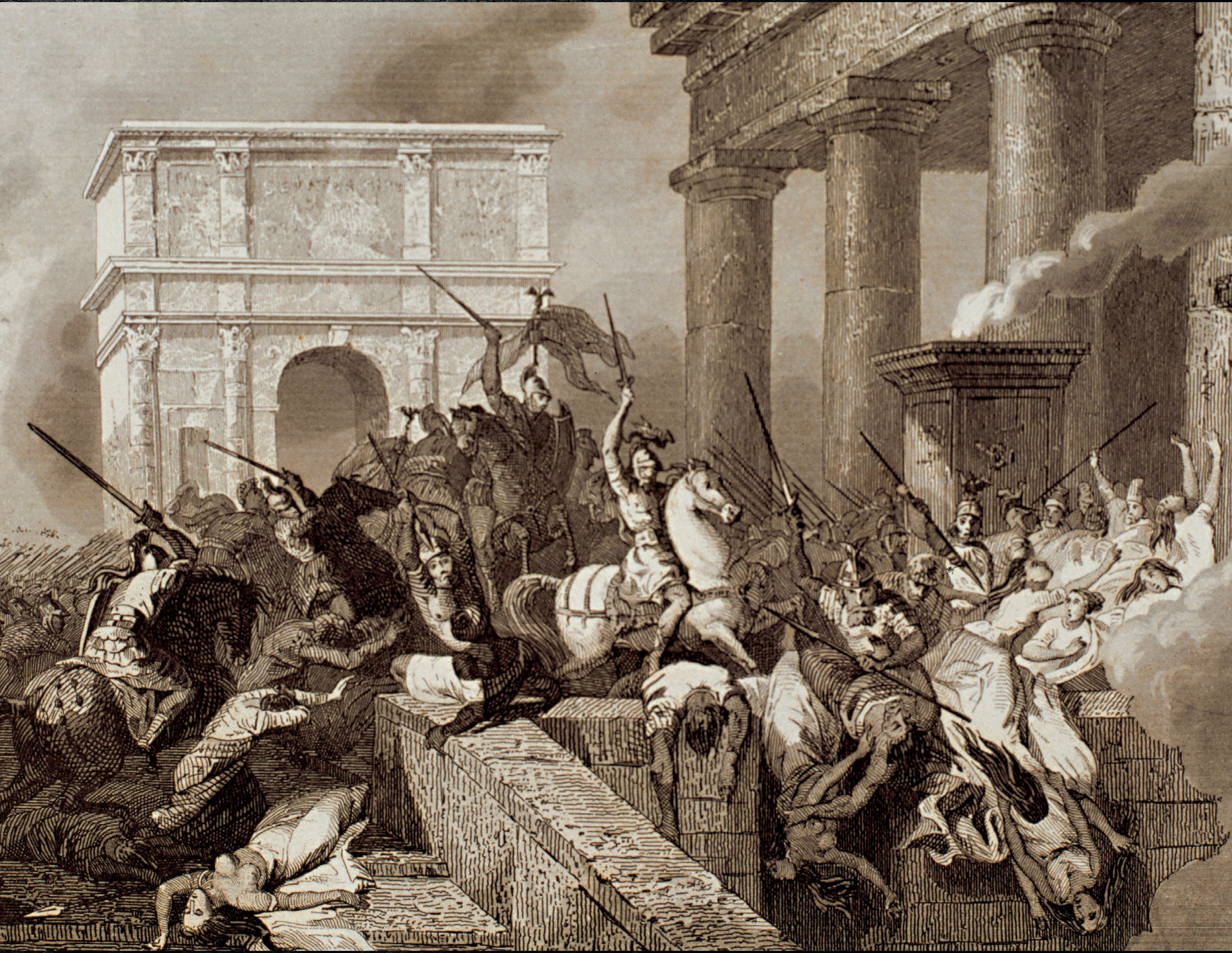
LEFT Ivory relief of Stilicho, AD400. Stilicho was born of a Vandal mother and a Roman father, and became the chief general of Theodosius I, whose niece he married. Stilicho went on to assume control of the western Empire on Theodosius' death. Monza Cathedral treasury, Italy. (Photo by Archiv Gerstenberg/ullstein bild via Getty Images)

ALARIC, ROMAN OFFICER AND TRIBAL WARLORD

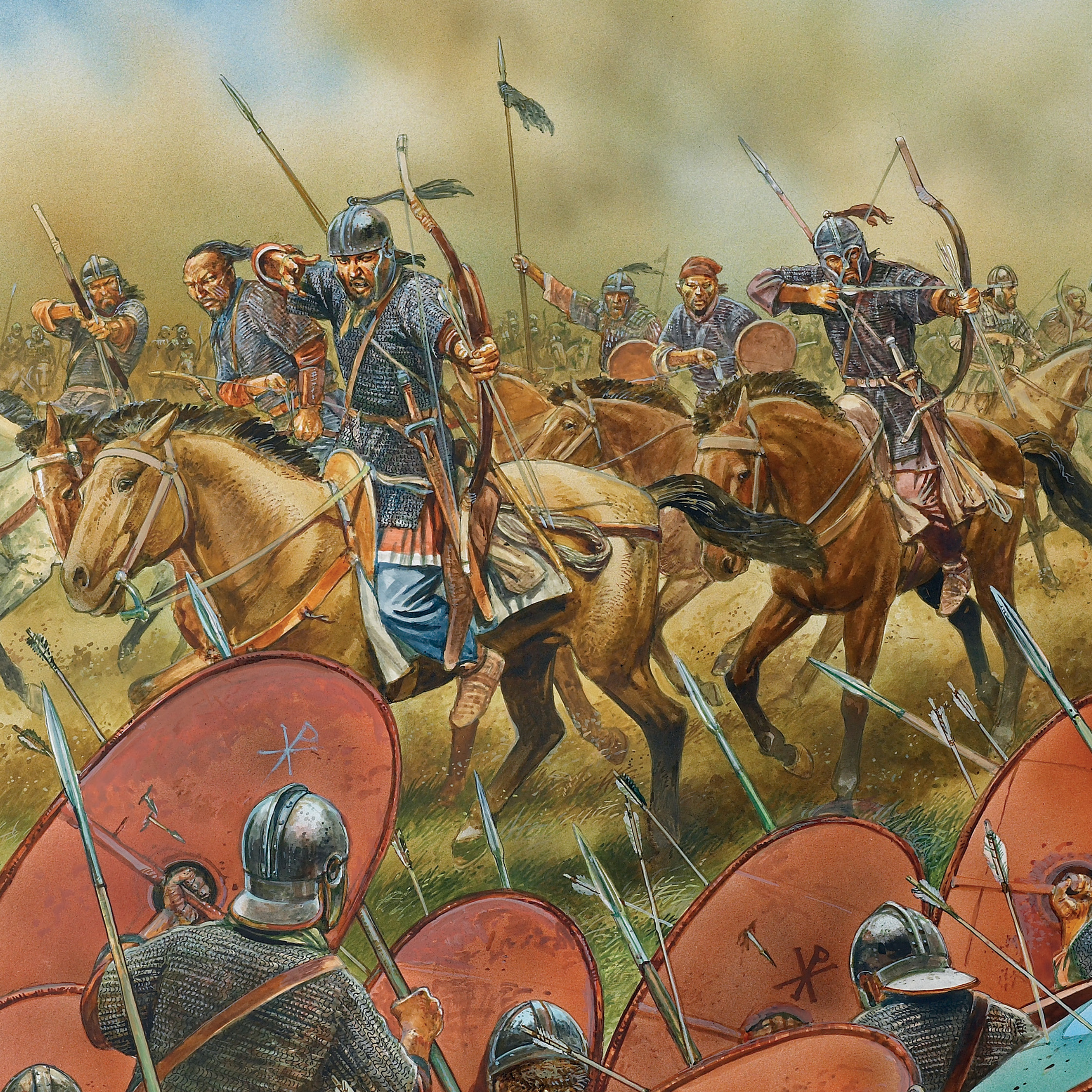
Alaric was born in about 370 into the Balthi, a leading family among the Gothic Tervingi. As a youth he probably participated in the Danube crossing of 376 and observed the subsequent encounters with imperial forces; at some stage he became an Arian Christian, the standard creed among the Goths. By the early 390s he had emerged as leader of a warband in the Balkans who opposed Emperor Theodosius, but in 394 he commanded tribal allies in Theodosius' expedition against the western usurper Eugenius. Disenchanted by inadequate recompense for his contribution to victory at the Frigidus river and the heavy casualties suffered by his followers, he proceeded to ravage the central and southern Balkans, taking advantage of tensions between Rome and Constantinople.

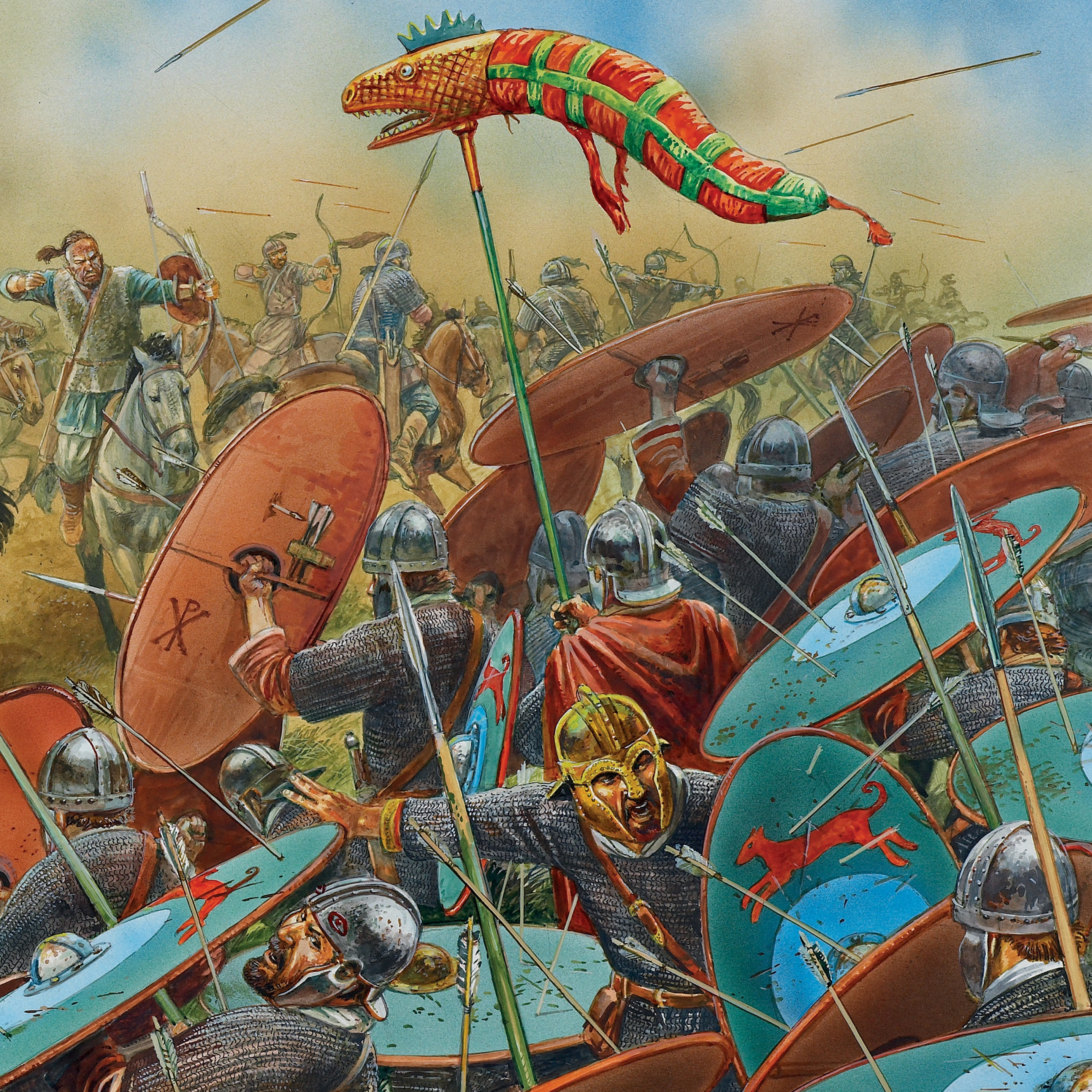
By 399 he had secured one major wish, the senior Roman command of general of Illyricum, which provided him with salaries and provisions for his followers. In 401 he invaded Italy and besieged the western emperor Honorius in Milan, but was defeated by the western generalissimo Stilicho; he was forced to withdraw to the Balkans as his men suffered from heat and poor food. He remained in the north-eastern Balkans, attempting to secure a permanent territory, until 407 when he was appointed general by Honorius as part of a western attempt to annex the Balkans. The planned campaign was cancelled, relations between Alaric and Honorius deteriorated, and Alaric invaded Italy again to secure payment for his contracted services. While negotiating with Honorius at Ravenna about territory, alliance and payments of gold and corn, Alaric besieged Rome. Honorius procrastinated, but in 409 the threat of starvation forced the Senate at Rome to agree terms; Alaric had the senator Attalus proclaimed emperor and Attalus appointed Alaric as a senior Roman general.

Tensions between Attalus and Alaric, plus further unsuccessful negotiations with Honorius, resulted in Alaric returning to Rome, which he easily captured on 24 August 410. Occupation of the city for three days may have relieved Alaric's frustrations, but did not satisfy his followers' needs for territory. Thereafter he led his forces south, with North Africa as his probable goal, but was thwarted while trying to cross to Sicily; as he withdrew northwards he became ill and died. His brother-in-law Athaulf took over the army, which he led into southern Gaul in 412 where the Visigothic kingdom was established in Aquitania.



Engraving of the sack of Rome by the Visigoths led by Alaric I in AD410, during the reign of Emperor Honorius. (Photo by Prisma/UIG/Getty Images)





PREVIOUS PAGE The Huns, armed with the formidable composite bow, and with Roman armour and weapons supplementing their equipment, attack at the battle of the Catalaunian Plains. Armed with light javelins and darts, in addition to their spears, the defending Romans hold their formation, encouraged by their centurion. (Peter Dennis © Osprey Publishing)

Aetius, only for Aetius' bodyguards to take revenge in March 455. For the next two decades control was contested between the different power blocs with interests in the western state: the Visigoths, Vandals, the eastern Empire and the Italian army under the patrician Ricimer, backed by a rapid succession of rulers.

One final attempt to crush the Vandals and restore western resources was made in 468 when a massive naval expedition was sent from Constantinople, but this was thwarted by Vandal fireships. Failure was ruinous for the eastern state – which spent 64,000 pounds of gold (more than a year's revenue) – and fatal for the western state: in 476, after a rapid turnover of rulers, the army of Italy under Odoacer deposed the young Romulus and returned the imperial insignia to Constantinople. Odoacer controlled Italy until Theodoric the Amal took Ravenna in 491 and established the Ostrogothic (east Goth) kingdom. Theodoric in his long reign (493–526) created a successful Romano-Gothic realm during which Italy prospered, and a ruler at Ravenna secured considerable power in southern Gaul and Spain and intermittent influence in Vandal Africa.

A SNAPSHOT OF THE LATE ROMAN ARMY

ROMAN MILITARY REFORM – THE *COMITATENSES* AND *LIMITANEI*

During the third century the Roman army made and unmade emperors at the drop of a hat. The rapid turnover of emperors meant many changes within the army, and the Empire itself would probably have collapsed far earlier than it did, had it not been for a series of soldier-emperors from Illyria. These men, commanding soldiers raised in the same region, managed to secure the frontiers and bring about a degree of stability. In terms of military organisation, Diocletian's major concern was for frontiers, reflected in the strengthening of defensive constructions, the construction of new roads, and the deployment of troops near the frontiers.

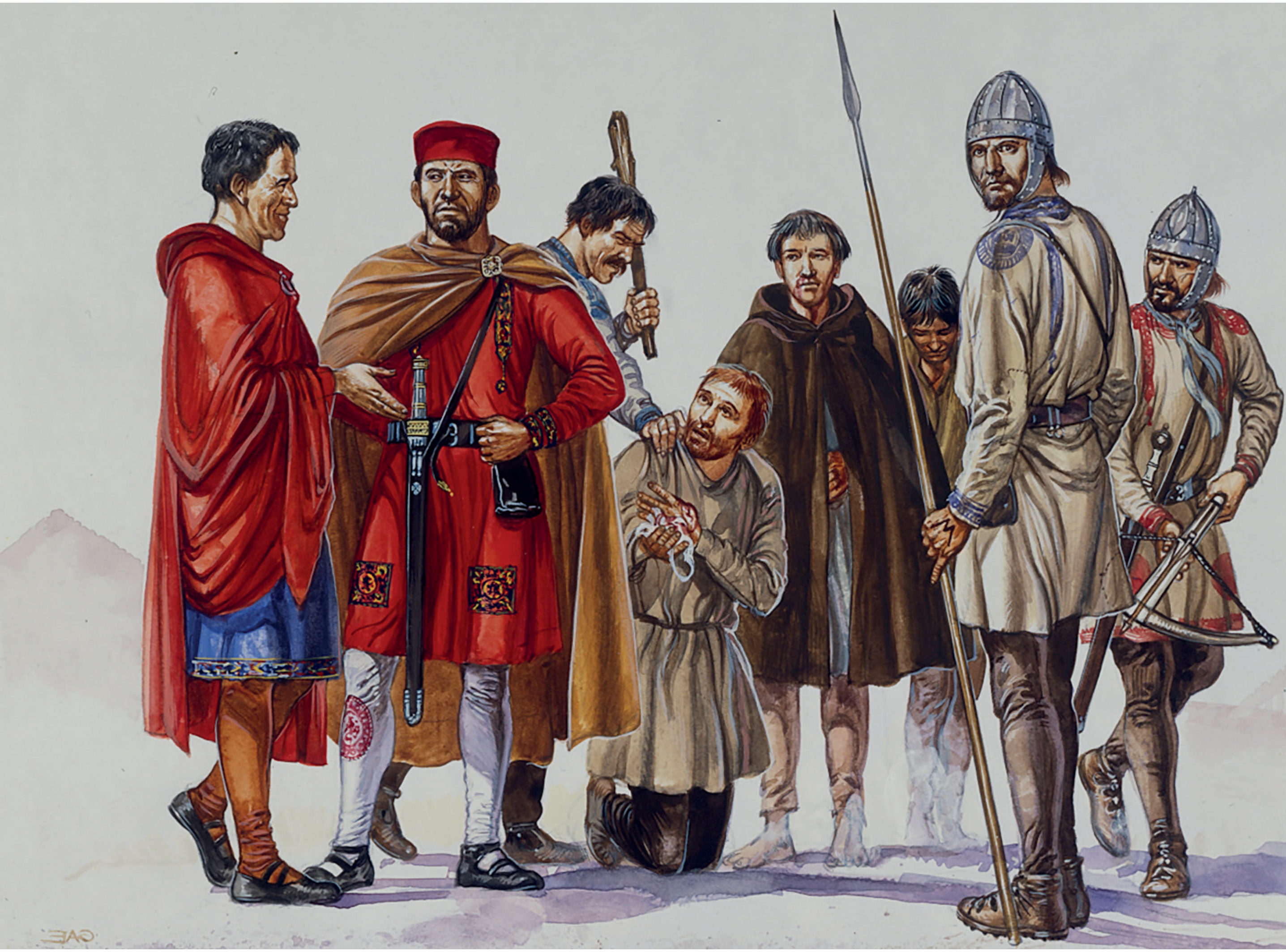
Diocletian's successor, Constantine, spent half of his reign involved in civil conflicts which actively diverted attention from the frontiers: he reorganised the central forces which accompanied the emperor, the *comitatus*, and created two prestigious commands for cavalry and infantry, the *magister equitum* and *magister peditum*. At provincial level military command was also separated from civilian duties. The new army that emerged from this reorganisation bore little resemblance to that which had preceded it. It was designed to provide a defence in depth; static troops of reduced status manned the frontiers, while field armies of new, smaller, more flexible units were held in reserve, ready to respond to sudden threats. At the core of the new army were the *comitatenses* – regional field armies based in central locations. They were formed partly by withdrawing some detachments from the frontier and partly by raising new units. Frontier forces, descendants of the old legions and auxiliaries, dropped in status and became stationary garrison troops known as *limitanei* (guarding the frontier zones – *limes*) or *ripenei* (based along the river frontiers). Eventually these troops became little more than a part-time militia, and they were rarely called on to take part in major campaigns. The new units created for the field armies were markedly smaller than the old 6,000-man legions: probably no more than 1,000–1,200 men. The majority of the army's foot soldiers, however, were provided by new-style units called *auxilia*.

RECRUITMENT AND SERVICE

By the time of the late Empire, soldiering was no longer considered to be an honourable or desirable profession, and it became increasingly difficult to find recruits to fill the ranks of the army. The obligation to serve in the army passed from generation to generation. Sons of soldiers, including officers, were expected to serve unless physically unfit. Volunteers were used, and at times bounties were offered to attract them. Slaves were normally not allowed to join, but exceptions were made in crises. Senators and municipal officials were also barred from the army. Hereditary and voluntary enlistment were not enough to fill the ranks, however, making an annual conscription necessary. The levy of conscripts was conducted in much the same way as the gathering of tax, with each village or estate being required to provide a set number of recruits.

Military service was seemingly so unpopular that great lengths were gone to to avoid it, including self-mutilation. Press gangs were occasionally employed to round up deserters and veterans' sons who were avoiding their duty. New conscripts were supposed to be between 19 and 25 years and physically fit. Sons of veterans up to the age of 35 who had evaded service could be drafted. Once accepted, the recruit was given an identity disc and certificate of recruitment. There are recorded instances of conscripts being branded on the hand or arm to identify them and make desertion more difficult. Desertion was certainly a problem, particularly amongst new recruits, and as a precaution draftees were locked up in prison each night while en route to their units.

RIGHT Conscription in the early fourth century AD. Here, reluctant young men are handed over to the recruiting party. In a desperate attempt to avoid conscription, one of the young men has amputated his thumb. (Gerry Embleton © Osprey Publishing)



The quality of soldiers recruited by conscription undoubtedly left a great deal to be desired, and would account for the fact that authorities looked more and more to foreigners to fill the ranks. The late Roman *pedes,* or ordinary infantryman, was probably not a Roman at all, and may even have had difficulty speaking any recognisable form of Latin. He was probably a German, but he could have been from anywhere inside or outside the borders of the Roman world. Roman armies continued to rely on substantial units of non-citizens during the years of the later Empire, especially when troops had to be recruited quickly, as in civil war or after military defeat, or for special expeditions. These 'outsiders' were often excellent troops who provided reliable bodyguards for emperors and generals.

Calculating the size of late Roman armies is a complex game for which most of the pieces are missing. In the third century, army units probably numbered upwards of 350,000, with a further 40,000 in the navy. Numbers increased significantly under Diocletian and Constantine, so that the total military establishment exceeded 500,000 – perhaps even 600,000. But paper strength will always have surpassed disposable strength, and many troops were committed to particular assignments so that only a small proportion of the total establishment could be deployed for individual campaigns. In the fourth century an army of 50,000 was large, and by the sixth century mobile armies rarely exceeded 30,000.

TRAINING

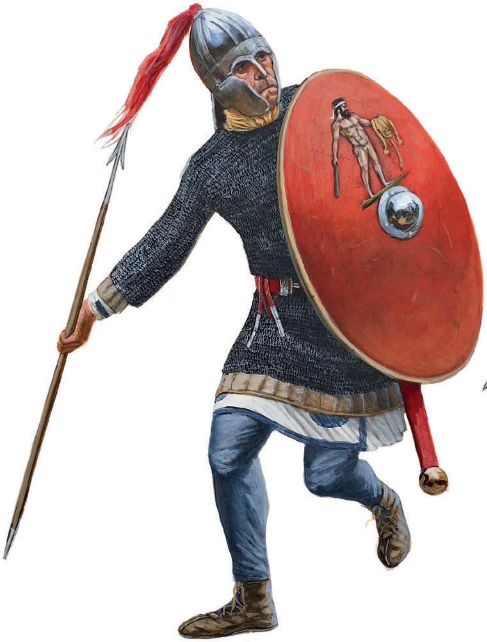
In addition to 'on the job' training, the recruit was formally instructed in weapons handling and drilled in unit manoeuvres. As in all armies, training varied considerably, not only in time and place, but also between units. Some units of *limitanei*, for instance, were little more than part-time peasant militia, with soldiers running their own farms and becoming involved in other trades. There are many examples of soldiers neglecting drill and becoming engaged in a variety of non-military activities, even cultivating the estates of powerful landowners. A variety of laws from the end of the fourth century indicate that the authorities tried to stop this – but apparently with little success.

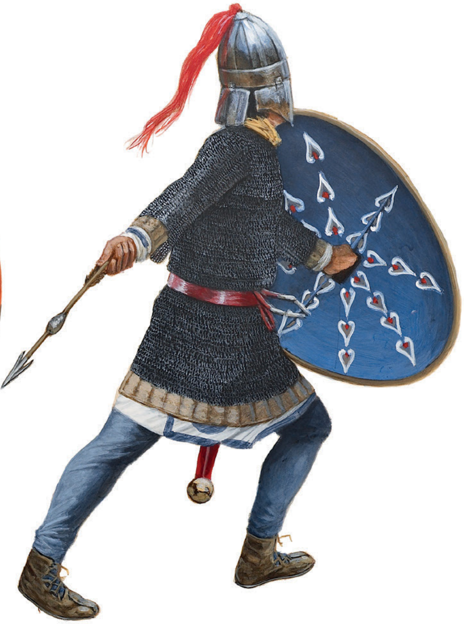
Weapons handling was the first and most important skill to be taught to the new recruit. He was expected to become proficient with a variety of weapons and to use them in different situations. In order to increase strength and accuracy, recruits were trained with weapons that were much heavier than normal, so that the task would seem much easier when they came to use the real thing.

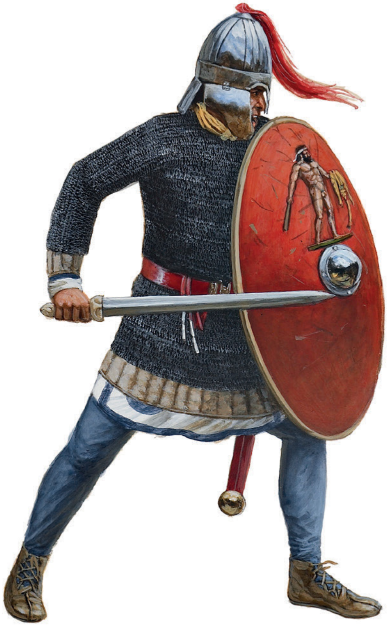
It is unclear how much drill, physical fitness or marching was included in the training of the late Roman soldier. Some Roman historians lamented that such exercises were being neglected, but to what degree probably varied considerably between units. Drill is described in the sixth century *Strategikon*, a military manual written to assist with the training of the late Roman army. It begins with the command:

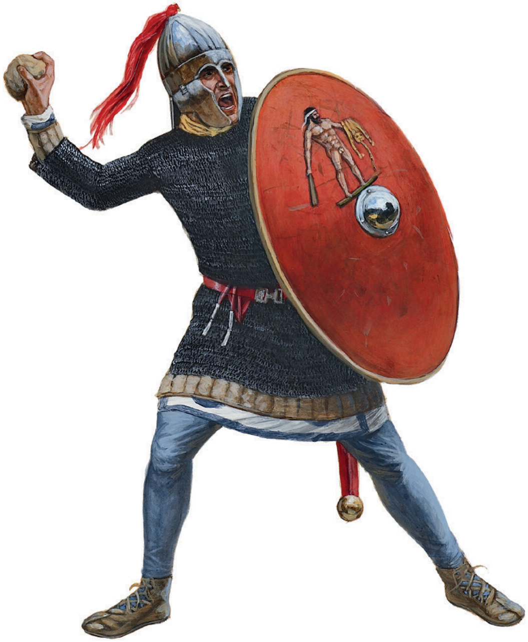
> *Silentum. Mandata captate. Non vos turbatis. Ordinem servate. Bando sequite. Nemo demittat bandum et inimicos seque.*

or ‘Silence. Observe orders. Don’t worry. Keep your position. Follow the standard. Do not leave the standard and pursue the enemy.’ The soldiers had to learn to respond to commands by voice, hand signal and trumpet so as not to be confused by the din of battle. They were trained to advance in silence while maintaining their alignment.









ORGANISATION AND LOGISTICS

Both legions and *auxilia* were essentially heavy infantry, performing basically the same task on the battlefield and being similarly equipped. A portion of the men in each unit, however, appears to have been trained as light infantrymen. There were also a number of specialist infantry such as *sagitarii* (archers), *exulcatores* (probably javelin men), *funditores* (slingers) and *balistarii* who acted as skirmishers or perhaps crossbowmen.

As the cavalry increased in importance in the fifth and sixth centuries, the infantry began to decline. However, this is not to say that the Romans switched entirely to reliance on heavy-mailed cavalry, an anticipation of medieval knights. Infantry remained the basis for most armies, and Roman foot-soldiers, when properly trained and led, were capable of defying all opponents. The infantry remained the backbone of the Roman army until well into the fifth century, although the average infantryman differed from his predecessors – he may not have been as well disciplined, but in many ways he was more flexible, ready for deployment to trouble spots, and for fighting both as a skirmisher and a heavy infantryman.

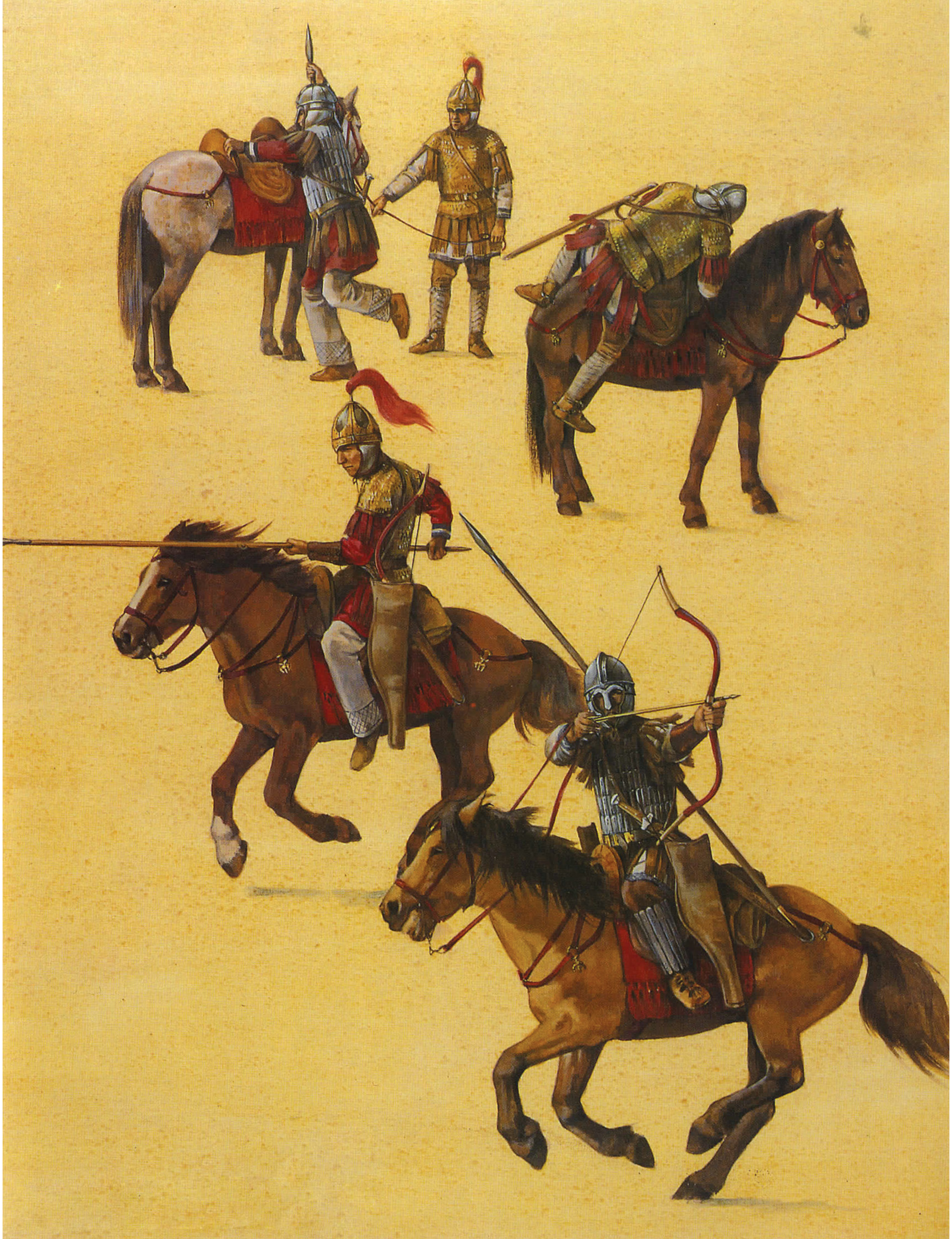
There had been a gradual change in the deployment of Roman armies. In the early Empire legions were quartered in major bases near the frontier (e.g. Cologne), but military need dictated that units were detached for specific duties at frontier

LEFT Combat techniques: the essential legionary fighting technique of javelin volley, running charge followed by toe-to-toe combat with swords, remained the norm. The man depicted top right is throwing a *plumbata* dart. The legionary in the bottom left uses the *spatha* ('long sword') rather than the shorter *gladius* of the Republican legionary. Soldiers using stones as missiles (bottom right) are depicted on the Arch of Constantine. (Seán Ó'Brógáin © Osprey Publishing) garrisons or in the interior. Later this *ad hoc* dispersal was consolidated so that troops were spread across provinces in numerous forts and cities. Emperors, however, also needed mobile forces for more rapid deployment. In the east there came to be two armies 'in the presence' stationed near Constantinople, and others in the Balkans and the east; in the west Gaul and Italy had their own armies until imperial authority contracted from the former.

APPEARANCE AND EQUIPMENT

By the end of the fourth century, the uniformity of Roman soldiers in appearance and dress would not have been anywhere near as regular as it had been in earlier years. Uniform issues were beginning to be replaced by a clothing allowance and by the sixth century even weapons and armour were expected to be purchased by the soldiers from an allowance. Troops of the *limitanei* probably bought their clothing from stores attached to their fort, so we can assume that a certain amount of 'local flavour' would have crept into the soldiers' appearance. Field armies had no fixed base, and were nearly always on campaign, so it is likely that their clothing differed greatly as well, due to logistical problems of supplying such troops. It is easy to picture such units after a long campaign presenting a very motley appearance;

RIGHT This painting shows the training of a cavalryman of the fifth century AD. The *Strategikon* gives us an idea of what the individual cavalryman was supposed to do: 'On horseback at a run he should fire one or two arrows rapidly and put the strung bow in its case, then he should grab the spear which he has been carrying on his back. With the strung bow in its case he should hold the spear in his hand, then quickly replace it on his back and grab the bow.' Such exercises would have required expert horsemanship as well as proficient weapons handling, and could have been expected only of the better units. (Christa Hook © Osprey Publishing)



clothing does not last long in the field, and the soldiers would have had to make local purchases fairly regularly.

Because of the lack of defined uniform, it would have been difficult to distinguish between a ‘Roman’ soldier (perhaps born a Goth) serving in the army of Stilicho, and a ‘Gothic’ soldier (perhaps born a Roman) in Alaric’s army. To identify such units in the field, shields were often of the same colour, and helmet plumes, too, were often a uniform colour. Such simple details could provide a degree of uniformity.

The question of how much armour was worn by the late Roman soldier has been a matter of debate. Writing in the fifth century, Vegetius says:

> For though after the example of the Goths, the Alans and the Huns, we have made some improvements in the arms of the cavalry, it is plain that the infantry are completely exposed. From the foundation of the city until the reign of the Emperor Gratian the foot wore cuirasses and helmets. But negligence and sloth having by degrees introduced a total relaxation of discipline, the soldiers began to consider their armour too heavy and seldom put it on. They first requested leave from the Emperor to lay aside the cuirass, and afterwards the helmet.

Conversely, the author Ammianus Marcellinus, who was a soldier himself, makes frequent reference to fourth century infantry in ‘gleaming armour’ and describes the infantry at Adrianople in 378 as ‘weighed down by the burden of their armour’.

Vegetius’ claim that infantry armour was abandoned in the mid fourth century can be partially accounted for by the obvious material losses sustained in the Persian and Gothic disasters of the time. It is also consistent with the increase in use of federate troops and the introduction of allowances in place of issued equipment. If the main field armies of the fifth century were composed of barbarians and a few elite Roman cavalry units, it is quite likely that an infantryman would not have been willing to pay for expensive armour out of his allowance, nor have any real need for it. A large shield would probably have been sufficient protection for troops who only had a static supporting role.

For most of the soldier's service he would have no call to wear armour. Marches were conducted with armour carried in wagons, while routine guard duty, foraging expeditions and skirmishing rarely called for armour. Only when called to fight in the line of battle did the late Roman soldier seem to need such added protection.

DEPLOYMENT AND TACTICS

On any campaign, most of the action consisted of small skirmishes, which would involve only a few men in the advance, rear or flank guards. Full-scale battles were very rare, perhaps only one in an entire campaign. For the most part, a typical soldier in the rank of the main body would trudge along day after day more concerned about the weather and food than the enemy. The fitter men in each party would sometimes be selected for a foraging or reconnaissance party.

Most contact with the enemy would have occurred when a fortified town was reached. Often they could be induced to surrender or, if too strong, they would be bypassed as there was no time to settle down to a long siege. When an enemy fortification was reached that did not surrender but that could not be assaulted, the army began siege operations.

The most common formation was the battle-line, or phalanx. This was solely designed to repel an attack, and was used because the infantry were usually deployed defensively in this period, with cavalry providing the army's offensive capability.

PREPARATION FOR BATTLE

It was felt imperative that the soldier be well fed and rested prior to a battle. The *Strategikon* advises that the ‘foot soldiers should not be expected to march long distances in full armour’ in order that they be fresh when they met the enemy. This was on Julian’s mind prior to the battle of Strasbourg when he told his men:

> *We are tired from our march … what are we to do when we meet the attack of the enemy hordes who will be rested and refreshed by food and drink? What strength shall we have to encounter them when we are worn out by hunger, thirst and toil? … I propose, therefore, that we set a watch and rest here, where we are protected by a rampart and ditch; then at first light, after an adequate allowance of sleep and food, let us, God willing, advance our eagles to triumph …*

According to Ammianus, one of the contributing factors to the Roman defeat at Adrianople was the fact that the soldiers had to march eight miles over rough ground under a burning sun before reaching the battlefield. Once there they had to stand in formation for several hours, without food or drink.

The *Strategikon* describes the process of forming up for battle under ideal conditions:

> *The divisions are drawn up in the battle line with intervals of one or two hundred feet between them, so they will not be crowded together while marching, but can still act in unison during battle and provide support for each other.*

The general’s standard would be posted in the centre of the battle line, and the first unit would form up there with the follow-on units forming to the left and right of it. Once in place the soldiers were expected to remain absolutely quiet. It could be many hours before they would be called upon to play their part in the engagement, particularly if their unit was second in line. In such a case the men would sit down and rest. ‘If the weather is hot let them remove their helmets and get some air,’ advises the *Strategikon*. ‘Only when the enemy gets close should the men be called to attention, and they will be fresh and in good condition.’

Arrian's *Against the Alans*, an actual battle order for a legion preparing to face cavalry, gives us a good idea of how such a formation would have looked:

> The legionaries will be formed in eight ranks and deployed in close order. The first four ranks will consist of men armed with the spear [probably *pilum*] … The men of the first rank will present their spears at the approach of the enemy … those of the second, third and fourth ranks will be in a position to throw their spears. They will be directed to aim their strike accurately at the right time in order to knock down the horses and throw the riders … The four ranks immediately behind will consist of men armed with the lancea [a light spear]. Behind these there will be a ninth rank composed of archers, those of the Numidians, Kyreneans, Bosposriuans and the Itureans.

One thing that is clear in all descriptions is that the various ranks in a formation performed different tasks. The first four ranks were expected to do the real fighting and consequently were more heavily armed. The file closers in the rear rank had a supervisory role, while the men in the intervening ranks were to provide depth to the formation and throw light javelins over the heads of the front ranks. Attached archers from other units would be drawn up behind and also fire overhead.

CAVALRY

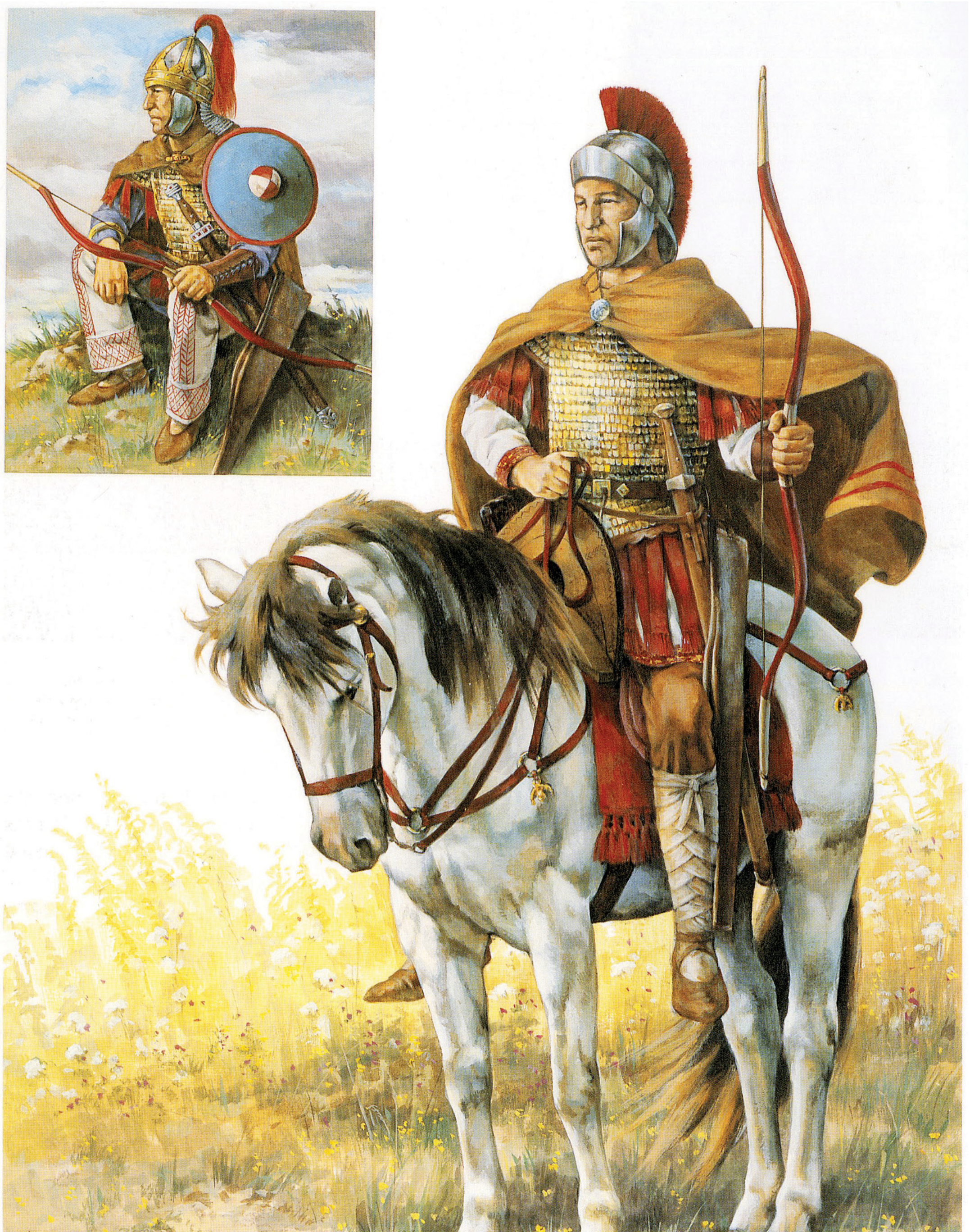
Before the fifth century Roman commanders expected to win their battles with a decisive infantry clash. The cavalryman's job on the battlefield was to support the infantryman and to provide the circumstances that would allow the former to do his job. Most Roman cavalry fought using skirmish tactics, and although they might have worn armour, they could be considered as 'light cavalry'. When the army formed up for battle the cavalry would be called upon to screen the deployment, hamper enemy deployment, protect the flanks of the infantry, defeat enemy cavalry and pursue broken opponents. They were not expected to deliver the crushing blow that would defeat the enemy army: that was the job of the infantry.

Over the fifth and sixth centuries this situation began to change, as Roman warlords surrounded themselves with bands of mounted retainers. By the sixth century the *Strategikon* recommends:

> The general would be well advised to have more cavalry than infantry. The latter is set only for close combat, while the former is easily able to pursue or to retreat, and when dismounted the men are all set to fight on foot.

This late Roman soldier was in fact much more than a cavalryman: he had become an all-round mounted warrior. With his bow he could skirmish at a distance, but he was also heavily armoured and well equipped for close mounted combat. When a steady force was needed to hold ground, he was quite happy to dismount and fight as a heavy infantryman. By the sixth century, Roman field armies had evolved into large followings of mounted warriors who owed allegiance to powerful warlords – direct ancestors of the feudal host. The old regional field armies were reduced, as were the *limitanei*, to static garrisons, and the cavalry had become the arm of decision.

RIGHT Armoured horse archers formed the bulk of sixth century armies. Inset is the same man, after some hard but financially successful campaigns against the Goths in Italy. He has added a small shield to his defensive equipment. (Christa Hook © Osprey Publishing)



LEGACIES

The four centuries of war during which the Roman Empire was torn apart provided the basis for a new political map of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. Instead of a collection of provinces whose different peoples, cultures and traditions were gradually transformed through contact with Roman power so that acceptance of a central authority was accompanied by a display of some common features, a fragmented world emerged; in different areas diverse elites came to the fore, a process whose results still dominate the modern map.

With new empires came new armies to fight their cause. Yet the Roman army discussed in this book has left an enduring mark on military history. Not only are the campaigns and battles of Rome still studied in depth at universities and military colleges around the world, but the power of the Roman military machine makes it a perennial subject for Hollywood movies as well as publishers. The history of the Roman army, after more than a millennium of study, shows no signs of losing its power.

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